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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

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NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD. V

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

The Certainty of God

CHAPTER I

RELIGION AND LIFE

WHEN a recruit joins the British Army he is provided with a religion as part of his kit. It is supposed to be as natural for a young man to declare his religion as it is to tell the day of his birth. Every normal man is expected to have a religion of some kind. It may have little influence over his thought and less over his conduct, but in some form or other it is there, to be found when sought for, as much a part of human personality as the power of thinking or of loving.

When we turn our eyes backwards and survey the history of humanity, we find that the assumption of the army is in broad agreement with the facts of life. From the Stone Age onwards innumerable records show that men have always worshipped something. It is true that the story of the religions of the world is so confused and contradictory that it is not easy to define any common element amongst them. In the name and for the sake of religion men have reached the

loftiest heights of devotion and sunk to the lowest depths of degradation. But to tell the story of man without finding in it a large place for religion is like the play of *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Whatever we think of religion ourselves, whether we think of it as the result of a direct revelation of God to man, or whether we think of it as as much out of date as witchcraft, we must study its manifestations before we can understand either ourselves or our fellows. Bousset is surely right when he says : " In spite of separation from other branches of human activity, religion has ever remained the central interest of this activity, and wherever the surging roar of life has been loudest, and wherever human life has been most profoundly moved in struggle and conflict, religion has been the cause."*

Now, from all this it follows that if religion is a universal fact there must be universal needs in human nature to which it appeals, and that in its perfected form it must satisfy human nature as a whole. If this be so, then the proper line of approach to any religion is the study of human nature. What am I ? What are my powers and my limitations ? What are my needs ? What is the purpose of my life ? If religion is worth anything it must give answers to such questions. And we, for our part, must work out the answers for ourselves before we can understand how far religion can satisfy us.

* Bousset, *What is Religion ?* p. 5.

Human nature is a very complex thing. In the *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, Oliver Wendell Holmes expresses this in his own whimsical way by saying that whenever John and Thomas talk together at least six personalities are taking part in the dialogue. Thus, there are three Johns—the real John known only to his Maker ; John's ideal John, never the real John and often very unlike him ; Thomas's ideal John, never the real John, nor John's John, but often very unlike either. And similarly there are three Thomases—the real Thomas ; Thomas's ideal Thomas ; John's ideal Thomas. "Only one of the three Johns is taxed," says Dr. Holmes, "only one can be weighed on a platform balance ; but the other two are just as important in the conversation."

Yet when John gets to work on himself he has to carry this analysis much farther. To begin with, he finds a *dependent self*. There is a self within every one of us which is conscious of its own littleness and helplessness. In the presence of the tremendous forces of Nature, face to face with the mysteries of pain and of death, this self reaches out for something beyond, some sure foundation of life on which to rest, and feels orphaned in this world till it has found some great Companion able to say : "Everyman I will go with thee, to be thy Guide in thy most need." If it cannot find this it falls back, as so many soldiers did in the war, on the thought of Fate. It must get rid of its burden somehow. It is

too heavy to carry. It has been truly said that "If we are to preserve our sanity in moments of utmost tension we must have some greater power on which we can throw the burden." Religion calls this power, God. It teaches that only in the sense of dependence on a greater Being can we rise above our surroundings and become independent of the world. If this were all that we found in human nature we should have the clue right in our hands of the prevalence of religion and need seek no further.

But it is quite manifest that this is not all we find. Side by side with this we find a second self which we may call the *assertive self*. This is a self which is impatient of the thought of weakness; proud of its own powers and eager to express them. It finds its expression in art, in creative work, in fearless thinking, in the fullest and freest fellowship with others, and claims the right to share in every type of human experience. To it the thoughts of the dependent self seem sometimes like morbid and unwholesome dreams, and it replies :

This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good :
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

If religion is to satisfy this self it must be not a crutch nor a shelter, but a fuller means of expression. It must mean not surrender but life.

But we must go farther still and add still a third which we may call the *moral self*. This

self hears the call to a higher and purer life than it has known and is haunted by the sense of moral unworthiness. It is conscious of a struggle between nobler and baser elements. It cannot rest content with the teaching that it is enough for a man to let every side of his nature express itself to the full. There is a judgment of value from which it cannot escape, which tells it that the world-old distinction between right and wrong is inevitably true. For all its struggles it knows that it is fighting a losing battle, and it cries out urgently for some new source of power and inward purification. We do not need to go far afield to find illustrations of this. The world's literature of conscience is full of them. We read Paul's tragic story of his own inward strife. "I cannot understand my own actions," he says, "I do not act as I want to act; on the contrary, I do what I detest. . . . The good that I want to do I do not perform. The evil that I want not to do that I keep on doing. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" There is no man who is honest with himself who has not had times when he has echoed that cry. Whatever else religion does it must meet this need or it will be vain.

But even yet we are not at the end. Just when conscience is most insistent there comes another voice, which we may call the voice of the *social self*. This declares that such scruples come because a man gets morbidly obsessed by his own personal needs until he is

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sick with self-consciousness. Out in the open there is sunshine and health, in the eager life of men, in the life of commerce or politics or social service. Leave your fancies and self-tormenting anxieties, it says, and press out into the life of others. Or as R. L. Stevenson puts it :

O to be up and doing, O
Unfearing and unshamed to go
In all the uproar and the press
About my human business !
My undissuaded heart I hear
Whisper courage in my ear.
With voiceless calls, the ancient earth
Summons me to a daily birth.
Thou, O my love, ye, O my friends—
The gist of life, the end of ends—
To laugh, to love, to live, to die,
Ye call me by the ear and eye !

Religion can only satisfy this self by showing that it is perfected not in isolation, but in being led out into a larger fellowship, where room is found for all the kindly humanities of ordinary life.

We can hardly doubt the truth of this analysis. Different aspects are prominent at different times and in different moods. Differences in temperament make one man primarily an artist and another a thinker and another a man of action, but yet in every normal being these selves are to be found.

Now when we ponder the different types of religion it seems plain that they have appealed

very often to one self only. Thus some forms of teaching have so emphasized the sense of dependence that human individuality has been crushed and the force and virility taken out of it. Man must lose himself in God and refuse steadfastly to assert himself at all. Other forms, like some of the wilder religions of the East, both in ancient and modern days, have so emphasized the right of self-expression that they have grown into uncontrolled excesses and given the name of religion to passionate self-indulgence. Others, again, have been so conscious of moral evil that they have tried to conquer evil by eliminating desire, and taught an asceticism which denies all that is pleasant and beautiful in life. And others, again, manifest enough at the present time, have made the service of humanity the whole of religion. Such views try to do justice to the reality of duty, and to the wealth of human love and social progress, but find nothing higher in the universe than the intellectual and moral activity of man, perfected in disinterestedness and self-sacrifice. Really they are only called religious by courtesy, or from the want of a better word to denote the devotion which they inspire.

It is our claim that Christianity is the highest and final form of religion because it combines into one harmonious whole all these imperfect teachings. It recognizes the need of some sure foundation of life and finds it in our Father God, who does not desire that man should lose his individuality, but that he should perfect it in the

life of sonship. It does not deny the right of our various powers to express themselves. On the contrary it teaches that man is made in the image of God, who pronounced His creation good and is best served by the fullest life. It does not minimize the greatness of the task of morality, but it teaches that our human desires are not to be crushed out of being, but rather used and directed towards the highest aims. When man finds this task too hard for him it brings to him moral reinforcement and renewing power. And, finally, when man considers the uplifting of humanity as a whole it bids him think of this as a task which he is sharing with God Himself, God who has shared our human life and is still bearing our burdens and leading us on towards a golden future.

It claims that when all possible allowance has been made for what we have gained from our education, from the society in which we live and from our inherited beliefs, we are brought, in the last resort, face to face with a living God, and that throughout our lives we may receive :

Authentic tidings of invisible things.

In the chapters that follow we set forth some of the reasons for holding this faith.

CHAPTER II

OUR FAITH IN GOD

THE part played by religion in human life is illustrated by the uses of the word and its derivatives in common speech. When Antony Wood writes: "An old word is retain'd by an Antiquary with as much Religion as a Relick"—he thinks of religion as a binding power, to be obeyed with scrupulous care and exactness. "He is a coward," says Fabian in *Twelfth Night*, "a most devout coward, religious in it." Poor Viola, in her brave man's attire, is bound to be a coward and is under obligation not to fight. When we hear someone say: "My religion is to do to others what I want them to do to me," we know that he means to tell us of the highest form of duty he acknowledges. Common to all such sayings is the thought that religion stands for the highest obligation known to man.

Yet such uses of the word, natural as they are, can easily be seen to take away that part of the meaning which is of most value to us. The chief characteristic of religion, in all its great historic forms, is the faith that there are higher powers than merely human ones, and that we may have

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real personal intercourse with them. Religion, in any real sense of the word, involves prayer, and prayer without someone to pray to seems an empty superstition. There may be those who find in prayer just a contemplation of the highest ideals of life, and a submission to their influence. But to most of us the question whether these ideals are grounded in a living God is imperative. Hence we are driven on to ask what we mean by God and whence our faith in Him is derived.

The answer to the question as to the source of our belief in God is not easy. To most, if not all, of the readers of this book, such a belief has been familiar from earliest childhood. We receive it from our homes, from the whole of our social environment, from the books we read, from the language we use. It was part of our life long before we thought of questioning its claims upon us.

When we come to the age at which we refuse to accept everything on the authority of others and seek reasons for ourselves, we find the belief full of perplexities. There is the familiar contrast between the teaching of the goodness of God and the mercilessness of the world we live in. There is the world-old question of the sufferings of the righteous. There is the rebellion of youth against restraint. There is the apparent failure of religious teaching to produce the results at which it aims. Most people who think at all have to confront these difficulties. Indeed, it is probably true to say that few people really be-

lieve in God until they have found out how hard it is to believe in Him at all. Is there any sure guide to faith?

To begin with, we have the old intellectual arguments. The more we learn the more we find that we are living in a world shot through and through by reason. It is not our reason, since, as the newer psychology and philosophy have been teaching us, reason in man, whether in the individual or the race, is quite a late arrival. This human *parvenu* seems a poor relation of ■ power everywhere at work. To suppose that men are the only thinkers in the universe seems preposterous. Hence we are driven back towards faith in a supreme Mind.

Moreover we find it hard to escape from the thought of a great purpose permeating the whole. There is a fine illustration used by Prof. Pringle-Pattison. He writes: "When we read or witness a play for the first time, and the course of the action is unknown to us, this sense of the solidarity of the whole, the prescience of an immanent destiny working itself out in individual scenes—in a word or a glance—naturally grows as we proceed, and reaches its maximum of intensity as we approach the close."* There we know that the mind of the master is being unfolded in his work. So the spectacle of this marvellous universe, with its pathos and its tragedy, its joys and sorrows, its triumphs and defeats, is not unlike this, and sends us back to

* *The Idea of God*, p. 361.

search for the Author of the wondrous whole. Of course, we may believe that the Author does not mean us ever to understand, any more than Browning was content to be revealed in his writings :

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best ?

We may follow Mr. Wells and speak of " the dark Power " at the heart of everything. But if there is no personal Power at all, then reason is vain and thinking a mockery.

But further still, we have to reckon with the claims of the moral consciousness. Much work has been done here of recent years. We have been taught the natural history of morality. We have been shown the slow stages by which our highest moral ideals have grown up out of primitive taboos and the like. It is often suggested that the old argument from conscience to God has been done away with for ever. But deeper reflection does not confirm this view. There is to be sure a natural history of science. We may see how from obscure beginnings, with magical views of natural forces, through innumerable errors and failures, the great discoveries of modern science have been prepared for. But the modern man does not doubt the conclusions of his teachers because some prehistoric Newton or Einstein blundered in his theories. Truths once discovered shine by their own light and give real

knowledge about a real world. It is the same with the truths of morality. However they came to us they are now inevitable. They likewise give us real knowledge about a real world, and tell us that the moral ideal is no less real than the world itself. Hence they drive us back to seek for One in whom the moral law lives, and from whom it comes to us.

Reason, Purpose, Morality, all three point back to God. Is it not true of Beauty also? When Francis Thompson says of Francis of Assisi, that "he discerned through the lamp Beauty the Light God," does he not utter the mind of every true artist that "the light that never was on sea or land" comes from the Father of Lights, the primeval Beauty? Beauty is as real as energy, as sure as duty. Must we not say that it also is not homeless in the universe or merely fugitive? It has its home in God.

Yet these familiar arguments, though they may forbid the attitude of final scepticism, leave us unsatisfied. They throw doubts on the conclusions of unbelief, but they do not go far enough to doubt our doubts away. Is there no surer voice to which we can listen, able to give us real unquestioned knowledge?

As soon as we ask this question Christianity points us to the teaching of Jesus, and declares that in Him we have given to us the full revelation of God. Let us, then, at this stage inquire what it is that He teaches about God.

In the first place, one cannot miss our Lord's

absolute certainty of God. As we ponder the arguments which have just been outlined we recall the words of Wordsworth :

The intellectual power through words and things
Went sounding on a dim and perilous way.

But to Jesus there was nothing dim or perilous in His thought of God. God to Him was a fact of immediate experience and it was wonderful to Him that men believed in God so little and that the faith they professed made so little difference in their lives. The question—"How is it that ye have no faith?"—is often on His lips. Surely, the pure in heart can see God. It is because men's eyes are half-blinded by evil that they miss the open vision.

'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

There are two words in particular that describe His teaching about God, *Reverence* and *Homeliness*.

The sense of the greatness and infinite power of God rests on all that Jesus says of Him. To Jesus, God was Lord of heaven and earth, the One supreme King and Ruler of all things, before whom all secrets were open. To Jesus it was almost incredible that men should use the name of God so lightly, should take it on their lips to support their trivial oaths, or use it carelessly as a pretext to excuse neglected duty.

Yet at the same time, God clothed the flowers, marked the fall of the sparrow, numbered the

hairs of the head. The homeliest images are used to describe God's relationships to men : the woman sweeping her house to find the lost coin, the shepherd setting out to find the one lost sheep, the father waiting to welcome back his wandering son. It may be said that Jesus takes what are perhaps the two greatest words of human life—home and God—and joins them together with perfect naturalness, making the one illustrate the other. At the heart of His teaching lies the thought that man away from God is homesick for Him, as the prodigal in the far country was homesick. To find God is as natural to man as it was for the lost son to meet his father's welcome. So soon as a man learns this he is at home in the world. Sunshine and shower are his Father's gifts to him ; prayer is talking with the Father ; life is a cheerful fulfilling of the daily task in the light of the Father's face, and the sharing of His kindnesses with all the other members of His great human family.

It may be said that one of the chief needs of those who call themselves Christians is to work out what is involved in this teaching. We have said, for instance, that to Jesus, God was King. But what did Jesus mean by a king ? Are we to think of an Eastern despot, ruling with absolute sway, claiming and delighting in titles of honour ? Shall we say with Milton :

His state

Is kingly ; thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest ?

If we do this we neglect our Lord's own exposition of what true kingship means. To Him royalty means service, kingliness means work for others, "even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." So God Himself reveals His Kingship by doing most and bearing all. The reverence that we pay to Him is not servile fear, but the moral reverence that cannot be withheld from One who is so immeasurably better than ourselves.

Similarly we say that the whole conception of authority is transformed by this view of God. Youth, in every generation, has been in revolt against an authority imposed from without, to be accepted without question. If this revolt is more manifest now than ever, it is because we are living in a time of great changes, when long established conventions have been challenged and old forms have been broken up. But always it has been true that the demand for unquestioning obedience has roused resentment. The familiar words :

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die :

are true of soldiers just because, for the time being, they have surrendered their individuality and have lost themselves in the army. But the life of a soldier, even though we grant that it may sometimes be a regrettable necessity, is very far

from the ideal life for a man. A man must reason why, and can only obey with his whole heart what he knows to be true and good. So the demand for religious obedience must command the allegiance of both heart and mind if it is to be accepted. But this is just what the thought of God which Jesus presents does for us. Those who can receive that teaching are not impelled by the fear of consequences or by the dread of an external penalty. What they fear most is estrangement from such a God. What they desire most is to have fellowship with Him, since they know that till they have found this fellowship they do not know what real life is. All thoughts of God from nature, from reason, from morality, from beauty, point onwards to some foundation of all our being. We must be loyal to such thoughts and follow them as far as they can lead. But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, if He really exists, is worthy of our passionate devotion. We obey Him because we can do no other.

It is worth while pointing out how completely the teaching of Jesus rules out some superstitions that still find a place in our language, whatever we make of them in reflective thought. We have always heard the saying : " It's a judgment on him." The writer was told quite seriously, only a year or two ago, of a wind that, for the first time on record, blew down a chimney and covered everything with soot because a woman had begun her spring-cleaning on Good Friday.

We remember the old cautionary tales of people who met terrible misfortunes because they did not keep Sunday properly or in some other way transgressed the code of their community. To such ways of thinking God is like a great policeman or schoolmaster, waiting His time to strike, keeping order by sharp penalties. All this was ruled out by our Lord. Those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, or had been slain by Pilate's guard, were not singled out for punishment by God. The old view that still survives in the legal phrase, "an act of God," which means, apparently, an act for which no rational explanation can be given, is utterly foreign to our Lord's teaching. In His thought of God there is nothing vindictive. Tireless patience, unwearied magnanimity, never failing goodness, are the marks of the God in whom He believed, and with whom He held converse. This is to Him the open secret of the universe, disclosed to the simple and the child-like. To know it is to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and brings rest and peace and joy.

Is this teaching true, or are we falling back into the old fallacy of personifying our own ideals? Have we grown beyond the criticism of Xenophanes?—"If oxen and lions had hands, and could paint with their hands and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen . . . So the Ethiopians make their gods black and snub-nosed; the Thracians give theirs red hair and blue eyes." Once, when men thought the

victorious soldier the highest of all human types, God was a Man of War. So to the philosopher who thought the unexamined life was not worth living, God was the supreme Thinker. Now, after bitter experience has taught us the futility of force and the majesty of moral goodness, we picture a God full of graciousness and compassion, inexorably good but immeasurably kind. But after all, have we any sure ground for believing that such a God really is? The rest of this book is taken up with the answer to that question, since the answer cannot be given in a sentence or two, but must rise out of our whole view of human life and history. Let us close this chapter by considering the answer of the New Testament writers.

They were sure of God, first because they found Him in the history of the past. We shall consider this in Chapter IV. But they were made certain of this by Jesus Himself. "We believe in God through Christ," says Peter. We turn to John's first Epistle and ask him, "Why do you believe in God?" The answer is, "We have seen Jesus, have heard His voice, have handled Him with our hands, and *we know*." We find the same thought expressed in our own times by Herrmann and may quote some of his glowing words. "God makes Himself known to us, so that we may recognize Him, through *a fact, on the strength of which we are able to believe on Him*. . . . We Christians hold that we know only one fact in the whole world which can overcome every doubt of the reality of God, namely, the appear-

ance of Jesus in history, the story of which has been preserved for us in the New Testament. Our certainty of God may be kindled by many other experiences, but has ultimately its firmest basis in the fact that within the realm of history to which we ourselves belong, we encounter the man Jesus as an undoubted reality.”*

Some who read these pages may know for themselves the truth of these words. Baffled and perplexed by the problems of life and thought, they have turned back to the Gospels. As they have read there has risen before their eyes the figure of the Son of Man, gracious, serene, confident. They have heard His message of the Father and it has stirred the depths of their hearts. They have become conscious that they are in the presence of God, so that, whilst their doubts have not been solved, they have risen beyond them. The One of whom it is recorded that He said, “No one cometh unto the Father but by me,” has led them to the Father. They have found God and God has found them. Who is this who leads men to God? What are we to say of Jesus? It is to this question that we must now turn.

* *The Communion of the Christian with God*, E.T., p. 59.

CHAPTER III

THE MEANING OF JESUS CHRIST

GREAT men are both the products of their age and the creators of the future. The great man, says Eucken, "is he who first clearly distinguishes the spiritual from the merely human, the eternal from the temporal, who first gives to life an independent worth, a value of its own, who first attains to the conception of universal and imperishable truth."* If in literature or in art the test of greatness is the creation of a masterpiece, in life as a whole the supreme test of greatness is the creation of a new way of life. Judged by such a test, Jesus stands above and beyond all other teachers who have swayed the life of mankind.

Yet it is plain that such a statement falls immeasurably below what the followers of Jesus in all ages have affirmed of Him. They have maintained that in Him we see actually God manifest in the flesh. In Him God has visited mankind and dwelt amongst them. Hence the name of Jesus is above every name, not only because of His genius for religion or the nobility of His life

* *Problem of Human Life*, xxi.

or the finality of His teaching, but because He is now, in the fullest sense of the word, divine, and receives as His due the worship of His people.

This is, indeed, a tremendous claim to make. When first we understand what it means it staggers us and seems to confound all our thinking. It has been said by an Indian missionary : " To the Hindu it seems impossible to find a sure foundation for the eternal truths of religion in the accidents or incidents of time." . . . " Is it possible" he asks, " that our faith in God should be made to depend upon the veracity of an historical fact occurring many centuries ago ? " *

Western thought gives abundant illustrations of the same perplexity. We find it dealt with in Origen's reply to Celsus, and it is still probably the main difficulty in the intellectual presentation of the Christian faith. Really to believe :

That the Eternal and Divine
Did, nineteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough ! you know
The all-stupendous tale—that Birth,
That Life, that Death!—

perhaps no man truly believes this till he has found out how hard it is to believe it at all.

When we ask ourselves why we believe this it is not easy to give an exact answer. To most of us it was part of the teaching of our childhood, confirmed by all the earliest influences of home and Church. As life went on and we met the

* *The Missionary Message*, p. 167. Edinburgh Conference Reports, vol. iv.

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conflicts of questioning and doubt, there were days when it seemed unreal and impossible. Yet still it forced itself upon us, till now in maturer life we repeat the confession of Thomas—"My Lord and my God." We are sure that Jesus is alive, that we are in daily fellowship with the living Christ, and that He has done for us and does still what no one but God can do.

When we try to justify such a faith we begin by turning back to the records of the wonderful life. Biblical criticism has scrutinized the records with the most minute attention and has had much to tell us about the mode of their composition. But the life itself only shines out more and more clearly. And what a life it is! We are brought face to face with One who stands apart from all the rest of us because He has no consciousness of sin. His words search our hearts; He brings us to our knees, confessing that we are sinful men; He so deepens the sense of duty that all our complacency is swept away, and yet with calm and unfaltering step He walked through life with His conscience unstained. Side by side with this we find that His life is not only pure and harmless, but rich in all the virile qualities that make up ideal manhood. We see this in the unconscious tribute of His disciples to Him. On Him and His sufficiency they rely with confidence, in His company they are safe. We see it in His ability to stand alone; in His unflinching pursuit of His mission even when the cross was foreseen; in His

reserve and self-restraint, His patience and long-suffering towards dull, unresponsive, self-opinionated people. We see it also in His power of righteous anger and fierce indignation against insincerity and unkindness. We see it further in the impression concerning His character which prevailed in the early Church. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might," was not written of One who was only "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Bushnell wrote long ago that "to be a perfectly harmless, guileless man, never doing ill even for a moment, we consider the same as to be a man destitute of spirit and manly force." We recognize that view, which confounds goodness with feebleness, gentleness with weakness, which calls brutality strength, and obstinacy firmness. But to look steadfastly at the character of Jesus purges the eyes and reveals the true moral values.

From the character we pass on to ask what Jesus thought of Himself. Here again we stand amazed. On the one hand we find that He lived in absolute dependence on God, and was meek and lowly in heart. But on the other hand we find that He claimed to be the central Person in human history. There is no need here to draw out the evidence for this in detail. We remember how all the prophets of the past were servants—He was the Son. John the Baptist was a tremendous figure, greatest of all teachers of righteousness, yet the humblest follower of Jesus in knowing Him was greater than John. Prophets and

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righteous men had longed for the day of God's fuller revelation, and desired in vain. But the disciples of Jesus had received what so many others had sought and failed to find. Who is this One towards whom all the history of the past had tended and in whom it was fulfilled?

For the answer we turn to other recorded sayings of Jesus. In the great passage at the end of Matthew xxv. the Son of Man comes in His glory and takes His seat upon the throne of judgment. Much unprofitable discussion has taken place on such minor points as the exact meaning of the word "eternal" and the like. But the heart of the teaching is that this Son of Man holds a personal relation to every member of the human race. He is with the prisoner in his cell, the sufferer in his sickness, the hungry in his need. In dealing with their fellows, even the weakest and the poorest, men have to deal with Him, and by their attitude to Him their destiny is decided.

Or we turn to another much discussed passage where He affirms: "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." There have been those who have tried to evade the plain meaning of these words, in the interests of a supposed orthodoxy, and there have been others who may have stressed unduly the ignorance which is here confessed. But the wonder lies deeper. The Man who speaks takes with perfect simplicity, as His right, a place beyond all men and beyond all angels, nearer to God than them all.

Or we take those unfathomable words, belonging to the earliest layer of the Gospel tradition, where He declares : " No one knoweth the Son, save the Father ; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." " Here we are brought face to face with a relationship of absolute intimacy and perfect mutual correspondence, which, by its nature, cannot be transferred." So Dr. Mackintosh writes, and continues, in words that we can only repeat with gratitude : " Not merely is the Father's being, to its inmost secret, open to the soul of Jesus, without that sense of mystery and inscrutable remoteness of which the greatest prophets had been conscious ; not merely is the Son's knowledge of the Father complete, final and inaccessible to every other save those to whom the Son is mediator : along with this goes the fact that Jesus' inmost being is known to the Father, and to none else. ' Between Jesus and God, one may say, all is common.' " * Such words help us to understand Paul when he tells us how our Lord, being originally in the form of God, emptied Himself to become man. They point to a consciousness of God which had its roots in eternity. The difference between Jesus and ourselves lies here. He stooped to come to us. We must climb to get to Him.

With this in our mind we understand His method with His disciples. He appealed to their

* *The Person of Jesus Christ*, pp. 27-8.

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judgment by declaring truths about God and themselves to which the deepest chords of their nature responded. His parables constantly threw them back to work out the meaning of the analogies He drew between the divine and the human. He made them conscious of a whole world of spiritual strength and joy that lies all round about us. He made them feel that that world was as real to Him as the world of sight and touch and hearing, that its powers were open to Him and its secrets known by Him. But all the time He was leading them up to the question what He was in Himself. Hence came His joy over Peter's confession. When Peter had declared that he saw in Jesus "the Christ, the Son of the living God," our Lord said that the first stone of the new building was laid, the building together into one habitation for God of all those who unite in the confession of His Lordship, and then set out to make His rule upon earth a reality. The more we dwell on these words, the more we see the majesty of the claim they involve. Our Lord knew what His work on earth was to be. He was to found a great community through which the world was to be brought back to God. The first decisive step was taken when He had brought one man to believe, not in His teaching nor in His programme, but on Himself. After that He was able for the first time to declare in plain words at what cost to Himself this purpose was to be realized, as He went on to speak of His passion and death.

It is not, of course, to be supposed that Peter

in his confession of Christ as the Son of God had any understanding of later Trinitarian doctrine. He knew that God had spoken to him in Jesus and that Jesus was the supreme messenger of God to mankind. Later, when convinced that his Lord was risen from the dead and was reigning in glory, his thoughts and those of his fellows rose higher. We can trace the process in the New Testament whereby the first believers were led to ascribe full divinity to the exalted Christ and worship Him side by side with God. As their thought interpreted their experience, they could find no halting-place short of this. If some of their words sound strange to us it may be because we know too little of their experience. When Sundar Singh describes a vision of the exalted Christ he says : " I felt when first I saw Him as if there were some old and forgotten connection between us, as though He had said, but not in words, ' I am He, through whom you were created.' I felt something the same, only far more intensely, as I felt when I met my father again after an interval of many years. My old love came back to me ; I knew I had been his before."*

It is easy to say that in such words we may have no more than echoes of Paul, but it is not adequate. What we have to explain is the likeness of the experience which the words strive to express. We must reckon with the fact that in every century and every race there have been

* *The Sadhu*, p. 54.

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those who have found in Christ all that their hearts craved for. If it be said that after all "Christ" to such men is only a symbol for the highest good they can conceive, we have to account for the fact that the very claims made for Himself by the Jesus of history have been fulfilled in the experience of His followers. The Sadhu writes, out of an almost unparalleled experience of suffering: "Amidst persecution I have found peace, joy and happiness. . . . In home He was there. In prison He was there. In Him the prison was transformed into Heaven, and the cross into a source of blessing."* It is the same gracious Person who is with him who spoke long ago of His own presence with the captive and the persecuted. When we consider how an Eastern Man has become the ideal of the West, a Jew of the Russian, we see in Him a personality that at once transcends and yet includes that of every individual man. We, by slow and painful effort, with multiplied mistakes which only a great love can cover, enter into the minds of men of races alien to our own. With Him every man who comes to know Him for himself is at home at once, and has the consciousness of being perfectly understood. In this also we may see the authentic mark of true divinity. There is in each one of us a central citadel into which we cannot admit even our nearest and dearest. It is our inmost heart which Francis Thompson calls :

* *Ibid.*, p. 52.

The hold that falls not when the town is got,
The heart's heart, whose immured plot
Hath keys yourself keep not!

Yet into that secret fortress He enters. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says of God: "There is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Christian experience says the same of its Lord. We can believe that, as the same Epistle says, He entered into the holiest place of all, because He is able to penetrate into the darkest place of all, the secret recesses of our human nature. And when faith applies to Christ the words:

Who made the heart—'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring—its various bias:—

it is a judgment of experience which justifies itself.

It is not now our purpose to follow the various forms in which Christian theology has sought to express this fundamental faith. Creeds and Councils are a little out of fashion. Yet we go far wrong when we allow ourselves or others to speak of the makers of the Creeds as mere word-spinners, delighting in subtle distinctions. When Athanasius, for example, declared "Our all is at stake," he was not contending for a formal orthodoxy, but for a living Christ. Arius, with all his

contempt for theologians, and his plea for the plain man, in which he makes Alexandria of the fourth century so strangely modern, was really abandoning the central faith by which the Church had always lived. We may urge that at Nicæa or Chalcedon the theologians were cumbered with an inadequate conception of God, owing more to Plato and his successors than to the Gospels. We may agree that we can never hope to understand either God or man by wearisome talk of substance, or essence, or nature. We may think that modern psychology has given us better tools. But behind all this there lay at the root of the thought of the noblest of the leaders the deep conviction : “ I *know* that the One who has saved me is Lord of heaven and earth.” If another view of the meaning of Jesus is to be the faith of the future, we must at least recognize that it is new and that it was not with such a faith that the victories of the past were achieved.

CHAPTER IV

JESUS CHRIST AND HISTORY

THE acceptance of the full Christian doctrine of the Person of Christ has many consequences. In the first place, it brings with it a new conception of God. The attempt to express this in the doctrine of the Trinity was one of the first results. If it was only partially successful the reason is plain. Not only does it lead thought into mysteries of which no full understanding is possible, but it started, as has been said, rather from the Greek conception of God than from the teaching of Jesus. Yet it is clear that if Jesus was what faith proclaims Him His teaching must be the real foundation.

In the second place, the doctrine of the Person of Christ brought a new conception of history. As Pfeiderer said: "The appearance of a heavenly being for an episodic stay upon our earth breaks the connection of events in space and time upon which all our experience rests, and therefore it undoes the conception of history from the bottom." There is much in such words that may be questioned. The word "episodic" is

not adequate. Faith claims that the life of Jesus was not so much an episode as a culmination. Further it may be said that "experience" must have a wider connotation given to it when the experience of the saints is included. Yet Pfeiderer's words utter a challenge that must be met. The Christian conception of history is, indeed, different from that of the scientific historian. He is disposed to tell us that Christianity arose in an age when the philosophy of history was unknown, and that it can no longer defend its claims in our more enlightened time. Or to put it otherwise, it is said that the days are past when we could consider the history of the Bible as a kind of fairyland where wonders happened unknown elsewhere. Such dreams have faded in the morning light of the new knowledge, since they belonged rather to the twilight than to the noonday.

We can only find the answer to such questions by considering the meaning of human history as interpreted by the Christian faith, and to this task we address ourselves in this chapter.

Faith in a God such as Jesus proclaimed brings with it the belief that God must reveal Himself to man. As has often been pointed out, it belongs to the very nature of personality to seek fellowship with others. Friendship is one of the first conditions of health and "the lack of fellowship is death." Hence to Jesus God is like the shepherd who goes forth to seek his wandering sheep, or the father who longs for his rebellious

son. If, then, there is in reality such a God, we must surely be able to find traces of His search for man through human history.

Now, the Christian claim is that such traces are everywhere to be discerned, but that there is one historical line along which the footsteps of the divine are most manifest, and that this is the line which runs through the history of Israel, and leads us up to Jesus. This is another of the paradoxical claims of Christianity that rouse opposition in the minds of many. Men are still inclined to say that "they didn't know everything down in Judee." The Hebrew race has made many notable contributions to human knowledge, but after all the assertion that it was God's chosen people belongs to a bygone age and can hardly be maintained to-day.

It helps us when we remember that this special claim of the Hebrew people has always seemed incredible. We may turn our thoughts back to Babylon at the zenith of its power in the sixth century B.C. If we could have questioned a Babylonian statesman with some idea of the meaning of world-politics, and asked him what would be the future of the remnant of the Jewish people, there can be no doubt as to what he would have said. He would have said that there were many analogies to lead to the true answer. Many another people had been uprooted from its home and settled in the land of its conquerors. Within a few years it was absorbed into the larger population, contributing, doubtless, something to the

life around it, but soon losing its national distinctiveness. Obviously that was the destiny of the Jews. If it had been suggested to him that when Babylon was in ruin and its empire a memory the Jews would still remain, and their faith would have become the possession of the civilized world, it would have seemed to him the wildest fanaticism. The words of the great prophet of the Exile about all the nations of the world waiting and longing for the truth that only the meek and suffering Servant of the Lord could bring them, would have sounded to him like foolish and impertinent fancy. Yet this fancy is now a sober fact, and if we reject the Hebrew explanation of the fact we are bound to offer a better one.

Let us turn back over the familiar ground of the Old Testament and ask what teaching we find there.

(a) We find supremely the conviction of the sovereign rule of the one God of righteousness, the God who sat enthroned at the Flood and who is still above all the tumults of the world, whose voice sounds out above the noise and confusion and proclaims, "Be still! and know that I am God." There are numberless illustrations of this. We watch Isaiah in Jerusalem as the relentless armies of Assyria overwhelm the Northern Kingdom and threaten to destroy Judah also. Yet this tremendous military power, overmastering in its force, is to him nothing but a tool in the hand of the Holy One of Israel, to be used and broken and cast aside at His pleasure. Or

we watch Jeremiah, that timid, shrinking youth, feeling himself nothing but a child in the face of the task committed to him, and yet note that the word of God entrusted to him means nothing less than the plucking up and breaking down, the destroying and overthrowing, the building and the planting of all the nations of the world. Or we turn to Mactabean times, when the little faithful remnant was harassed and persecuted, when it seemed hopeless that Jerusalem could ever be recovered and the religion of Israel survive the storm. Then we open the Book of Daniel. We ponder the many-coloured pageant of history that passes there before our eyes. One thing is certain. The great heathen powers are brute beasts under the control of a Master. Their day will soon pass and then the everlasting kingdom of righteousness will be established. It has been truly said that in the Old Testament the problem is not whether good or evil is to prevail. That is a certainty. The only question is what God will do with the heathen powers, with Assyria or Babylon or Greece.

(b) But further we find in the story of Israel the gradual unfolding of the great truth of the vital union of morality and religion. The world has not yet outgrown the tendency to put religiousness in place of morality, to compound for neglect of its social duty by ritual performances or subscriptions to funds, or to rest on the pleasing emotional excitements of public worship whilst the heart remains cold to the needs of the

world outside, or even of the neighbour in the next street.

Nowhere else in the world's literature is this tendency exposed with such scathing power as in the Old Testament writings. Such familiar illustrations as the words of Isaiah i. need only be mentioned in passing. But further, nowhere else is the real basis of social ethics laid down with such clearness. When we read in Leviticus : "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. *I am the Lord*," we see the whole distinctiveness of the Old Testament teaching in these few words. Love to one's neighbour is indissolubly linked with the sovereignty of God. It is because man has been made in the likeness of God, nearer to Him than all the rest of His creation, that the value of every individual life and the sacredness of personality are taught with growing distinctness. It is to be sure a study of arresting interest to watch the growth of this conception ; to see the extension of moral duty from the kinsman or tribesman to man as man ; or to mark the progress till Amos, for example, proclaims that the God of Israel will execute the judgments of righteousness over all the surrounding peoples for offences against common humanity. Such a study delivers us from the need which some of our fathers felt of justifying actions controlled by a rudimentary code of morals and an imperfect conception of God. But at every stage of this development we find the relationship between God and man set forth as the foundation of morality.

We need not go far afield to find illustrations of the earlier stages even in modern life. In one of the big military camps in England in the earlier stages of the Great War there were in one hut three men who were notorious thieves, who knew a great deal about the inside of prisons. Their old propensities were so strong that the men in all the huts round found it necessary to keep a constant watch, and always to have an informal sentry on duty. Yet within the hut where they themselves lived it was quite safe to leave anything lying about, even money, and it was never touched. The thieves' code of morals respected the property of those who were sharing the same hut, though it recognized no obligations to those outside. So the Old Testament narrator glories in the way in which David cheated Achish, pretending that he was ravaging his own people, whilst in reality he was carrying on pitiless raids against Geshurites and Amalekites. It is plain that the chronicler recognizes no moral duty towards them. They were, as he explains, "the inhabitants of the land, which were of old," and no doubt he thought them fair game. It is a very up-to-date story in a world which often thinks that savage races are the lawful prey of more cultivated peoples. It is a long way from there to the dream of the day when Israel, the Servant of the Lord, shall be "a light to the Gentiles ; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." But the

story of the progress is unmistakable. We feel that the thought of God brooding over the great city of Nineveh, pitying its crowds of helpless and ignorant heathen, its multitudes of little children, its herds of cattle, as the Book of Jonah shows us, is the true development of the thought of God who chose Abraham; whose enduring purpose is to teach men to think of one another as He thinks of them, and to treat one another as He treats them. The great controlling thought which shines out at last with perfect clearness is that you cannot deal rightly by any man till you have learnt his relationship to God. A man can only do justly and love mercy by walking humbly with God.

(c) Yet it may still be urged that after all, even though much of what has been said is granted, we are still far from proving the thesis with which we started, that in the history of Israel we find the central line of God's revelation of Himself to man. It may be admitted that the great teachers of Israel have made imperishable contributions to the spiritual history of mankind, and that their message is still unexhausted, but it is still far from being demonstrated that because of that Israel must be considered as a people apart. We are debtors to all the past, to Greece and Rome no less than to Israel. Why should we isolate Israel? Why not rather trace the footsteps of God all through the long journey of humanity towards truth and knowledge? It is a fair question and demands a reasoned answer.

First, then, following our modern psychological method, we must inquire into the consciousness of the men through whom these messages came. At once we find them possessed by an inward certainty of God. Take, again, the one who is, perhaps, the greatest of them all—Jeremiah. We see him rebelling against the call which he would fain refuse. Yet the word that came to him was like an inward fire which he could not restrain. He was compelled to utter it even though it burnt up all that was pleasant and desirable in his own life. It made him a lonely man, it exposed him to hatred and contempt, it branded him as an outcast and a traitor. Yet though he resented fiercely the summons that came to him he could never doubt that it was from God. And at last, with his own life in ruins and Jerusalem in the power of the enemy, he spoke his noblest word of all, of the coming day when in the gladness of the New Covenant all men should know God and live at peace.

But, further, this consciousness was not that of a solitary thinker. The pioneers of truth have often been lonely and misunderstood, and yet so certain of what they have discovered that they could not hide it for all that the world could offer. They have often found the truth of Plato's words about the ideal man : "In such a situation the just man will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every kind of torture, will be crucified."*

* *Republic*, 362.

But the differentia of the prophets of Israel is that however lonely they felt themselves in their personal lot, they were all alike conscious of being in a national succession. They belonged to a nation which had been chosen by God and sealed to Himself by a Covenant in history. They criticized with all their force the popular idea that the nation was God's favourite, and taught that His choice of them brought duties rather than privileges. But they never doubted the choice and the call itself. Israel—the thought becomes ever clearer—was a nation with a world-wide mission, and its task was the establishment of God's Kingdom upon earth. We may surely say that such a consciousness of national destiny is unique.

Yet it may still be urged that this consciousness was mistaken. We may recognize and inherit the spiritual truths that these great pioneers discovered. But whilst the truths are the precious kernel, the outward expectations are the husk that may be thrown away. In one sense this is true. We do not look to see, with some of them, an earthly kingdom with its centre at Jerusalem. The discipline of history has dissolved that dream. Yet whilst the form of the dream has passed, we hold that the substance remains. At the root of their experience lay the deep conviction that through their race God was preparing some greater and fuller revelation of Himself. We claim that history has justified this belief because the Jewish race culminated in

Jesus Christ. As we explain the beginning by the end, the seed by the fruit, so we explain the story of Israel by the person of Jesus. If the history of Israel had not found its crown in Jesus its claim to uniqueness would be much weakened. If He is not a unique Person, Israel is not a unique people. But if He is, as we have urged, the central Person in human history, then the nation from which He sprang can maintain its claim to be God's chosen people. The two thoughts are indissolubly bound together.

Christian faith has always been conscious of this, though it has sometimes expressed itself in ways that are strange to our ways of thinking. There have been those who found Christ everywhere in the Old Testament, who saw even the less important details of His life foreshadowed in dark prophetic words, or in obscure ritual observances. We have grown beyond this mode of exposition now, but the essential truth which it sought to express still remains. The Bible is unique because it brings Christ to us. In His manifestation we see a great historic redemptive act of God. Looking backwards we see the preparation for this act in the history of Israel. We trace the growth, through ignorance and error and wrong, of the faith in the one almighty, all-holy God. We follow, through all its various phases, the expectation of some fuller and final revelation. And we draw the conclusion of John that whilst the Light was always in the world, shining on darkened hearts that only discerned

fugitive glimpses of it, in Babylon and in Athens, as well as in Jerusalem, yet all the time God was cleaving "a channel for the waterflood, a way for the lightning of the thunder," and that channel and that way lay along the history of Israel.

This is the Christian philosophy of history. We find it in Origen. He writes: "For no noble deed among men has ever been done without the Divine Word visiting the souls of those who even for a brief space were able to receive such operations." And he concludes: "There is nothing absurd in the fact that to the Jews, with whom were the prophets, the Son of God was sent; so that beginning with them in bodily form He might arise in power and spirit upon a world of souls desiring to be no longer bereft of God."*

* *Origen adv. Celsum*, vi, 78, 79.

CHAPTER V

THE FACT OF SIN

IF we survey the ground which we have covered we see that man, with his manifold nature and varied needs, cries out for a God that can complete his personality and give him a sure foundation for life and hope. We see further the claim of Christianity that God has always been seeking to make Himself known to men and that He has done this, finally, by revealing Himself in Jesus Christ. We must now go further still and ask whether revelation is the last word, or whether there is not a deeper need still, the need of Redemption.

At the heart of the Christian faith lies the conviction that man is a sinful being needing God's forgiveness and moral renewal. God's love to the world and the world's resistance to the love of God are the two great facts that the Christian theologian has to set forth and explain.

Now, in considering this position we have to mediate between two tendencies. On the one hand, there are those who assert that forgiveness is inevitable. Of course, God forgives; "*c'est son métier*," that is what He is for, said Heine.

On the other hand, there are those who proclaim that forgiveness is impossible. We live in a world of inexorable consequences. We must pay in full the price for all our follies and mistakes. Neither whining nor praying can set us free from the chains we have bound round our own limbs. What we need is the manly courage that does not fear to face facts, but makes the best of the strength that remains unimpaired. Neither position can satisfy us. The former cuts the nerve of morality and is destructive of moral earnestness. The second drives us back to Stoicism and the despair of human progress. Yet, after all, we have an uneasy consciousness that the Christian message does not, as once it did, win its answer of penitent confession from human hearts. Changed views of human origins make men less ready to affirm: "there is no health in us," or at any rate, less ready to charge themselves with responsibility for such a fact. At the same time the new calls to service for others, the tasks of social reconstruction, the opportunities of making the world a brighter and happier home for our fellows, make the ancient expressions of penitence begin to savour of the cloister and the cell, with a kind of mustiness that the fresh breezes of life dispel. Tell a man that he is a sinner and he listens languidly and unmoved. Set before him some great programme of self-denying toil for the good of humanity, and all that is virile and heroic within him responds to the summons.

Let us, therefore, in this chapter inquire into the real meaning of the fact that men have always and everywhere, with the consciousness of God discovered the consciousness of sin.

One of the most modern passages in the Bible is the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. St. Paul does not appeal to any external authority or creed, he explores the depths of his own consciousness. Conscious of the moral struggles and disorders of maturer years, he turns back longingly to the happy time when no stings of accusing conscience forbade him to rest in peace. Then he lived in the lost paradise of innocent childhood. But he is certain of this, that as soon as ever he became conscious of the moral law he knew that he had broken it. That seems to be the universal experience. As we grow up into moral self-consciousness and begin to examine our own experience, we find from the first a sense of failure and of wrong. It is not that we have any distinct recollection of some first definite act of wrong-doing, it is rather that with the growth from unconscious infancy into childhood and youth comes the sense of imperfection and of fault.

We may take another illustration from Dr. Rufus Jones's charming book, *A Boy's Religion From Memory*. He says there: "I meant to be good. I knew I ought to be. Almost from babyhood I had been told that God wanted to use me in His service, but spite of everything I was for ever finding myself in the wrong path. The

happy period of innocence—the brief lease of the Garden of Eden which every child all unconsciously has—was soon over for me. The first mouthful of the apple of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is back of the period of memory, but as far back as I can go I find my Eden very badly lost.”*

Here then we find the basis of the doctrine of sin. It is grounded on a universal fact. It may, of course, be argued that such a statement is simply wrong because there are those who deny that they have or ever had such a consciousness. To that one can only reply in the words of Henry Sidgwick as to the ultimate nature of moral obligation: “I am aware that some persons will be disposed to answer all the preceding argument by a simple denial that they can find in their consciousness any such unconditional or categorical imperative as I have been trying to exhibit. If this is really the final result of self-examination in any case, there is no more to be said. I, at least, do not know how to impart the notion of moral obligation to anyone who is entirely devoid of it.”† So we may add that we have nothing to say to those who are not conscious what unfulfilled moral obligation means. We can only appeal to the constant testimony of the wisest and best of our race, and repeat that they have always felt that when the commandment came sin sprang to life.

Proceeding a step further it is manifestly right

* Op. cit., p. 68.

† *Methods of Ethics*, p. 35.

to say that a universal fact presupposes a law. Its universality forbids us to seek for its explanation either in chance, or in the actions of individual wills. It must have some adequate cause. The Christian doctrine of Original Sin, satirized and ridiculed as it has often been, was at least a serious attempt to formulate this law. We shall return to it later. Meantime, we may consider two other attempts to formulate such a law, each widely current at the present day.

(a) It is not unnatural to explain a universal fact as an inevitable result of the nature or stage of growth of the beings in whom it is found. If all men are sinners, then, it may be urged, sin, whatever it is, must be as natural to man as language is. It is normal for human beings to learn to talk, else they would never learn to think. So it is normal for them to perform what we call sinful actions, because in no other way could they discover what manhood really is. In one form or another this conception has a long history. There are some suggestions of it in the Old Testament. In the Book of Job it is said that man is impure in God's sight because his nature is material, the physical is also the morally frail. Perfection belongs to the Eternal One alone, and even the angels are charged with folly in His presence. So elsewhere we find man's physical weakness pleaded as a reason why God should be merciful to his sinfulness.

In more philosophical forms this view is always with us. Leaving out of sight the forms of

thought which teach that matter is essentially evil, we find the view that as man passes from the unconscious innocence of childhood to the self-determined virtue of maturer years, the stage of sin is inevitable. Perilous though the journey may be, since no one can make it without falling into some of the pitfalls of the road that must be followed, there is no other way of coming to be a person. If this is so it is enough for us to maintain the difference between virtue and sin, and to affirm that virtue is the greater good of the two. There is no point in affirming that sin ought not to be or that it is "absolutely and positively bad." To do this, says Dr. McTaggart, "is useless to morality and fatal to religion." He finds hope in the belief that "in the long run sin must always disgust the person who commits it."

When examined more closely there is little ground for hope in such a position. When thought out it leads to the obvious fallacy that a full knowledge of evil is necessary to a full experience of virtue. It suggests that the self remains the same throughout and that when tired of the practice of evil it is just as capable as ever of becoming virtuous. This is plainly untrue. It may be that every form of sin leads to disgust and satiety. But it does not follow that the sin-wearied man will turn towards virtue. A far deeper psychology is found in our Lord's teaching about the Empty House, in Luke xi. There we hear of a man from whose heart an evil spirit

departs, leaving his home vacant for a time. This is a picture of a man who has grown out of one form of evil, as old age grows out of the passionate sins of youth. Yet, presently, since the house still remains without a tenant, worse forms of evil come and take possession of it.

The truth of this is manifest. The cold and hard cynicism of a man who has tried many forms of wrong-doing, and has abandoned them because they no longer interest him, is the most hopeless state that can be conceived, and the farthest removed from real virtue. Moreover, such theories are more fit for the study and the lecture-room than for the market place. The spirit of remorse will not be exorcized by telling the sinner that his wrong-doing has helped to make him a man. It has made him the man he is, but not the man he ought to be. He knows that in his own life and that of others there are sinful acts where the evil is vastly greater than any possible good that can flow from them, acts which mar the life of the individual and hinder the progress of society. Conscience tells him inexorably that sin is more than infirmity, more than human weakness. He cannot be persuaded, in the long run, that conscience is deceiving him.

(b) Yet, after all, there is much that is true in the opinions just described. So soon as a man seriously faces the moral problems of life he is driven to make three affirmations. First, he says, "I am a sinful man." No sophistry can hide that fact. Next he goes on to declare,

"I have a sinful nature." He finds within himself tendencies toward evil that are far deeper than conscious moral choice. Lastly, as he looks round upon the world of men, he is bound to assert, "I belong to a sinful race." If, then, man's nature is sinful, must we not also say that it is defective? And, if so, why may not sin be regarded as the consequence of our present imperfection?

There is one famous answer to this question on which we must dwell for a moment. We find it expounded with terrific energy by Augustine. To him human nature fresh from God was pure and stainless. For a brief moment in man's long history his nature was free from every taint of evil. Then followed the tragic and fatal act of our first ancestors. Human nature as a whole became defiled and utterly corrupt. It is this corrupted nature which we inherit from our parents. The sins which we commit are not stepping stones on the steep ascent to virtue, they are stages on the road to everlasting death.

If we ask why this view, in spite of its harshness, has had so powerful an influence in human thought, the answer is not far to seek. Augustine held tenaciously to the solidarity of mankind. Not for him the exaggerated individualism which would treat humanity as beginning afresh with the birth of each child, coming fresh and stainless from the hand of the Creator. He knew the strength of the ties that unite us to the past, that we bring with us into our lives much of our ances-

tors and can never escape from them. That we cannot follow him in many of his conclusions is due, not to any keener moral vision, but to the new light as to the origin and early history of mankind which has dawned upon these later days.

(c) We turn, then, to the restatement of our question in the light of Anthropology and the doctrine of Evolution. No one who considers this subject can escape from a debt of gratitude to Dr. F. R. Tennant for his illuminating discussions, and for the time we must follow his exposition. He points us to the fact that before the race attained full moral personality it had passed through a long previous history. Sin was to begin with the survival of habits and tendencies which were not originally sinful, but became so when they were persisted in in resistance to the higher forces, which could not at first be recognized as making for righteousness. The sinfulness of these habits when persisted in lies, as Archdeacon Wilson said, "in their anachronism ; in their resistance to the evolutionary and Divine force that makes for moral development and righteousness." We find the same thought, differently expressed, in Browning.

What I aspired to be,

And was not, comforts me :

A brute I might have been, but would not sink i'
the scale.

That is to say, it is man's aspirations to rise above the brutish tendencies of his nature that

are the real mark of his humanity. He fails when he ceases to struggle and drops back to the level of the beast. It is for man, says the poet, to make his bodily powers help, and not hinder, the life of the soul, so that, body and soul together, he may grow upwards towards perfection.

Dr. Tennant goes on to show that we can observe the same process in the growth of moral self-consciousness in a child. There is a non-moral period first. Then the power of will and the duty of choice begin to emerge. The task of morality "consists in the formation of the non-moral material of nature into character, in subjecting the seething and tumultuous life of natural tendency, of appetite and passion, affection and desire, to the moulding influence of reflective purpose. Here, and not in any universal and hereditarily transmitted disturbance of man's nature, is to be found the occasion or source of universal sinfulness. It is simply the general failure to effect on all occasions the moralization of inevitable impulses and to choose the end of higher worth rather than that which, of lower value, appeals with the more clamorous intensity."* Dr. Tennant agrees that with the dawn of moral consciousness we find ourselves to be sinful. But he thinks that we err if we proceed to judge that we have always been sinful, "subject from birth to an indwelling power of sin." "What introspection really discovers is an inter-

* *Origin and Propagation of Sin*, p. 110.

nal conflict between nature and nurture, natural desire and moral end ; and this is the inevitable condition of human life and the expression of God's purpose." He strongly urges that this teaching does not destroy the sinfulness of sin. " If sin can be traced back, in race and single person, to the transgression of a sanction not then recognized as that of God, it loses nothing of its exceeding sinfulness for us to whom it is none the less a deliberate grieving of the Holy Spirit."* " Man's condition denotes on our theory of sin a parody of God's purpose in human history, though not a fall from an actual state of original righteousness."†

What light does such an exposition throw upon the three fundamental propositions which we found lying at the base of the doctrine of sin ? It leaves untouched the first and the third—that I am a sinful man, and that I belong to a sinful race. But it goes far in helping us to understand the second—that I have a sinful nature. What is man when he is born ? Is he, as some philosophers once taught, a sheet of white paper on which the world writes its signature, or an empty room rapidly filling up with impressions from without ? Not so. He is the heir of all the past. As modern psychology teaches us, he is born with a mass of instincts, stirring within him and moving him to the appropriate action, long before the dawn either of the consciousness of self or of the sense of moral duty. Some of

* *Ibid.*, p. 112.

† *Ibid.*, p. 122.

these instincts, notably those of pugnacity, of self-assertion, of acquisition, express themselves so powerfully that as moral consciousness dawns the possessor finds that already :

The state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.

He tries to reduce this state to order and fails and cries despairingly, " I have a sinful nature." But is he right in saying this ? If to have a sinful nature means that he is at once personally and individually responsible for what he is, then the affirmation is wrong. But if he means that he has been born with a nature that is sinful because it falls short of what God meant it to be, then he is surely right. Generations of wrong-doing and self-assertion have strengthened the instincts that lead to what he now knows as evil. The social ideals that surround him, manifested in the behaviour of his own family and friends and people, are faulty. He is far from what he might have been, just as mankind, with its warships and poison gases and bitter quarrels and envyings in the twentieth century after Christ, is far from what it might have been if only it had learned to follow the ideals of Jesus. We are caught in a mesh from which neither the individual nor the race can deliver itself. The world is still, as Paul saw it, "groaning and travailing in pain," full of yearning for a Deliverer. This is a sin-stricken world, and needs a Saviour.

CHAPTER VI

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

WE have seen that history and experience alike compel us to own the tragic reality of moral evil. How, then, is it possible to reconcile this with faith in the Lord and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do not the world's shame and wrong point to the conclusion that man is left to himself to struggle upwards as best he may? How can we believe that there is a God who really knows and cares whilst so many facts appear to deny it?

This is a question as old as humanity, and it becomes increasingly plain that no answer can be given to it unless Christianity can declare some new truth about God which will help to solve the problem. Let us go on to inquire what the teaching of Christianity is.

Now it is manifest that there have been many days in human history when the triumph of evil and the overthrow of righteousness have led men to deny passionately that there is any power at all that makes for goodness. Some have held on to their faith in spite of everything. They

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have comforted themselves by saying with Lowell :

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—

Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,

Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

There is strength in such teaching. It is good to believe, even when so many ideals lie shattered amidst the wreckage of the Great War, that the cause of righteousness must prevail. Whether this trust can maintain itself to-day is another matter. It seems to rest on the belief in human progress, and that very belief is insistently challenged from many sides. Though there is a struggle for existence among ideas, "it does not necessarily follow," writes Dr. Inge, "that the ideas which prevail are better morally, or even truer to the law of Nature, than those which fail."* If faith is to triumph it must show a God not only keeping watch within the shadow, but active in human life. Can Christianity do this ?

Let us go back to the day of the Crucifixion and ponder what it must have meant to all who believed in goodness. We think of the pure and stainless human life that was being ended on the Cross. We see Jesus walking through Palestine with His face radiant with the certainty of the Father's love. He had staked everything on

* *Outspoken Essays*, Series 2, p. 129.

God and risked all for His sake. Yet now He hangs helpless on the Cross and from the gathering gloom there come those awful words: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Where was God then? Is it enough to say that He was really there, only within the shadow? Is it enough to say that the Cross of Christ has, indeed, swayed the future by its undying message of heroism and devotion? There is truth in this, but it falls immeasurably short of what Christianity affirms. Where was God when Jesus hung on the Cross? In the shadow? Not so! Let us listen to Paul. "God was *in Christ*!" In the midst of it all, on the Cross, burdened, suffering, stricken, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." It is a tremendous answer. If it is true, it has endless consequences. What God was then He is always. So, then, He is not now within the shadow, keeping watch, but rather, in the midst of the world's suffering and sin, suffering with us, bearing our burdens with us, that we may be delivered from their shame and curse. We never approach the central meaning of Christianity till we have grappled with this teaching and wrought out, as far as we may, its consequences for ourselves and for humanity.

We cannot miss the fact that this is a startlingly novel thought about God. Many times in the religious thought of mankind the gods have appeared as merciful, forgiving the wrongs done to their laws. More often they have appeared as the righteous avengers of evil, bound them-

selves to obey, as in Greek tragedy, the inevitable laws that bind punishment to ill desert. Sometimes, again, the gods were thought of as living in a blessedness of their own, immeasurably removed from the struggles and pains of men, and altogether untouched by them. It is true, indeed, that there have been stories of gods who became men and lived on earth for a time. But the thought that in the human Jesus dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form, and that the Incarnation took place that God might deliver man from his evil state by sharing it with him, is the great distinctive mark of Christianity alone.

So soon as we begin to ponder this teaching we discern its supreme moral value.

In the first place it manifests the truth that man can only be saved by fellowship. Preaching to men from a height is useless by itself. Just as no man can attain to moral maturity except through the society of his fellows, so no man can escape from moral evil save through the fellowship of those who are better than himself. Even the appeal to the better nature of a man is useless unless that better nature striving upwards can meet the warmth and stimulus of friendship and of love. Similarly no man can save another except by giving himself to him. Christianity teaches that God gave, and still gives, Himself to save men.

Moreover, the friendship that gives itself to save another must shrink from nothing in the

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acceptance of all the consequences that such self-surrender brings. It must be ready to give all and to bear all. Is not this exactly what Christianity tells us that God did in the gift of Christ? All that He had He gave. He spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all. Real fellowship shrinks from no consequences, it gladly accepts them all.

When we try to understand this teaching we often stumble just because we are confused as to the meaning of the word "consequences." We are haunted by the thought that to bear the consequences of another's wrong-doing means to accept the punishment due to him. Many theories of the Atonement perplex and repel us just because of this misconception. Surely, we say, punishment never can be transferred! If we could transfer it, it would be morally wrong to do so. Since all righteous punishment is inflicted as moral discipline, to save a wrong-doer from such discipline would often mean the taking away of his hope of deliverance. But, actually, in the nature of things, punishment cannot be transferred, since even if another bore the punishment due to a sinner, he would not be punished, he would only suffer innocently. This seems unchallengeably true. Yet, in a very real sense the man who gives himself to save another bears the consequences of his sin. It is clear that he bears it first by sympathy because, with his purer moral insight, he feels more keenly the degradation of his friend. It is a strange perversity of thought

which supposes that only a sinful man is able to sympathize with a sinner. On the contrary, sinners are not fit to judge of sin. As Martineau wrote, in a great sermon on Christ's Treatment of Guilt: "The blindness which is induced by all deliberate injury to our moral nature, and which thickens its film as the habit grows, is one of the most appalling expressions of the justice of God. Moral evil is the only thing in His creation of which it is decreed, that the more we are familiar with it, the less shall we know of it. The mind that is rich in holiness and the humanities, appreciates every temptation, computes the force of every passion, and discerns the degradation of every vice, with a precision and clearness unknown to the adept in wrong." There is no sympathy like that of a pure and holy love, that feels intensely the shame of the fallen one, and sees with clear vision the distance between the depths to which the wrong-doer has sunk and the ideal which was possible. That is a consequence from which love can never escape.

But, further, the real friend bears the consequences of his friend's wrong-doing by sharing his life with him. Whilst others ostracize the wrong-doer he cleaves to him. He reveals a love unchecked by ingratitude and undismayed by the company into which it is dragged. Such a love hopeth all things and believeth all things, and will never leave the one beloved even though it is dragged down to degradation and to outward ruin.

It should not be said that such a love is

unthinkable. Few of us do not know some shining instance where husband or wife, or father or mother, or friend, has borne all for the sake of love. To know such things exalts and purifies our own souls and assures our faith in goodness.

Is not this the very teaching of the Cross? We are sometimes told that we must choose between the older teaching of a God who punished Jesus instead of us and the teaching of a God who, by a display of love, overcomes our stubbornness and draws us out toward Himself. But, surely, it is the word "display" that is wrong. There is no display about love. Without thought of self it loses self in the service of others. We may ponder the words in which Dr. G. B. Stevens sums up the teaching of Bushnell: "Christ's moral power is not the power of mere example, nor the revelation of God's love alone, but in His suffering and death we behold the operation in salvation of all God's perfections."* The meaning of the Cross, wherein is summed up and completed the whole meaning of the life of Jesus, is not example, nor revelation, but *action*. God does not coax men to be good, He acts. He does more than plead, He shares our life up to the bitter end. It is not substitution but identification. God is active in the world to-day, and He will not cease to strive till in fellowship with Himself men are lifted up above the power of evil. That is the message of the Cross.

We may go on to ask why such teaching, if

* *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 236.

really true, is not more effective, and whether present hatred and evil in the world do not prove that what we are saying is mere sentiment. We may answer surely that the reason for this is partly because the message has been so imperfectly grasped, and partly because even nominally Christian people have been so slow to apply the method of reconciliation which they ought to have learned from the New Testament. If this last suggestion is true we need not seek further for an answer. Jesus said : " If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This is not a threat so much as the statement of a principle. Until men have learned to apply God's way of reconciliation in their relations to their fellows they cannot understand it as applied to themselves. Until they learn to love they cannot understand a God who is love. Hence they remain unreconciled to God because they are unreconciled to one another. It is not hard to see that if God's method of reconciliation began by His sharing the lives of men who had offended against Him, most of us have been very slow to copy Him. Let us take an illustration from one of our great teachers, never nominally a Christian, but who has an uncanny knack of piercing into the depths of human nature. In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* we remember how Richard had thrashed Benson, the butler, for spying on him, and Benson was waiting for the apology which had been promised him. Meredith draws an inimitable picture of Benson.

“Heavy Benson was told to anticipate the demand for pardon, and practised in his mind the most melancholy Christian deportment he could assume.” And then follow the words: “Damnatory doctrines best pleased Benson. Benson was ready to pardon, as a Christian should, but he did want his enemy before him on his knees.” Here, as so often in Meredith, we are afraid that we are peering into a looking-glass, and seeing a portrait, not very much distorted, of ourselves. Are we not disposed to say: “Let us see the signs of penitence and then it will be time to think about forgiveness. Till then, we will wait. It is he who is in the wrong. Let him take the first step. Why should I expose myself to the risk of misunderstanding or humiliation by going out of my way to look for him?” But God did not wait. He began to seek men whilst they were still hard and impenitent, making His sun shine and His rain fall on the unthankful and the evil, bearing, in Jesus, all the gainsaying of sinners against Himself, all the excuses and quibbles that show up the real inward nature of those who make them. The wrong was with men, the initiative was with Him. It is because our practice is so unlike this that we find it so hard to understand Him.

Yet it may be urged that after all our moral analysis is not deep enough because reconciliation is a two-sided relation, and cannot be complete unless both parties are agreed. In particular where a real wrong has been done it is essential that the offender should see his wrong and admit

it. Before a broken friendship can be restored the two friends must be at one in their moral judgment of the evil that caused the rupture. It is of no use to ignore the offence, or, as we say nowadays, to drive it down into the unconscious. It will remain there as an irritant, poisoning the springs of life, and preventing any real unity of life. Doubtless all this is true. We may illustrate again from a great work of imagination. When Arthur Donnithorne, light-heartedly, and with no real sense of wrong, asked Adam Bede to forgive him, Adam said: "We're not friends, and it's better not to pretend it. I know forgiveness is a man's duty, but, to my thinking, that can only mean as you're to give up all thoughts o' taking revenge: it can never mean as you're to have all your old feelings back again, for that's not possible. He's not the same man to me, and I can't *feel* the same towards him. God help me!" But later, even when he knows that the wrong committed has been immeasurably worse than he had dreamed of before, the sight of Arthur's suffering for his sin, and his real and bitter sorrow for what he has done, opens the way for a reconciliation. "I've no right," says Adam, "to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent," and the two men clasp hands, "and with that action there was a strong rush, on both sides, of the old, boyish affection." Here we note how the impossible becomes actual, as the old feeling springs to life once more. This is true forgiveness.

What conclusion are we to draw from this? If we go back to the New Testament the answer is plain. Reconciliation, in the fullest sense, is impossible without penitence. But God did not wait till men were sorry before He was gracious to them, He made them sorry by being good to them. Again it is at the Cross that we learn this. A man may be hard and defiant and on the defensive against all suggestions that he has anything really to be ashamed of. But the meaning of the Cross begins to dawn upon him. There comes, as Dr. Moberly writes, "a little turning of the face to the east, a little melting of the stiffness of heart, a little kindling of a new desire, a little lighting of the flame of the spirit," and then the overwhelming sense of sin, and the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That has been the path of deliverance for many and it is still God's way of hope. Applied to human relationships it would transform society. If, instead of waiting for those who have wronged us to repent, we continued to do them good in every possible way, showing our readiness to enter into their lives, and to share their burdens with them, we should win them in ways that now seem incredible. How true it is to say that Christianity has very rarely been really tried!

Let us ask as we close this chapter how far such teaching meets the questions that older views of the Atonement sought to answer. In the first place it surely shows "how awful goodness is." Goodness cannot live with evil. It

cannot ignore it with easy good nature. It must destroy it. Sin that has become lodged in human nature must not be covered up. It must be burnt out. "Our God is a consuming fire." Can we find a more overwhelming demonstration of God's horror of evil than in the suffering of God in Christ? Sin killed Jesus, and broke His heart. God help us if it has never broken ours!

Further, such teaching surely reveals the passion of God for holiness. So far from His remaining unmoved, He is shown to be intensely active in His conflict against evil. We see Jesus entering into the darkness, until at last the consciousness of the world's sin veils for the moment God's face from Him. Yet even there He does not falter. He held fast to God, trusting where He could not see His face. Long ago Dale, grappling with the problem of forgiveness, maintained that if a righteous God did not punish sin, "some other divine act of at least equal intensity, and in which the ill desert of sin is expressed with at least equal energy, must take its place."* Dale found this act expressed when, as he says, "He was forsaken of the Father, and He died." We cannot follow Dale there. Some words of an older writer come back to our minds when George Macdonald writes: "God was His God still, although He had forsaken Him—forsaken His *vision* that His faith might glow out triumphant; forsaken *Himself*? No; come nearer to Him than ever; come nearer, even as—but with

* *The Atonement*, p. 391.

a yet deeper, more awful pregnancy of import—even as the Lord Himself withdrew from the bodily eyes of His friends, that He might dwell in their profoundest being.”* If God was in Christ on the Cross, He was there when the darkness was deepest; then, most of all. And yet Dale was right in struggling to express the thought that we must find some tremendous moral act of God declaring His holiness. But we find this in the whole life of Jesus, growing more and more manifest as He becomes despised and rejected of men, and culminating in the agony of the Passion and the Cross. As we ponder the revelation of the character of God that is made we find ourselves repeating the words of Bushnell: “There is a cross in God before the wood is seen upon Calvary; hid in God’s own virtue itself, struggling on heavily in burdened feeling through all the previous ages, and struggling as heavily now, even in the throne of the worlds.”† Is this the God whom Jesus revealed? This is the ultimate question, since all our thoughts of God must meet that test. Jesus tells us that we shall be like God, sons of our Father, when we love our enemies and pray for them that persecute us. “But love your enemies, and do them good, and lend, never despairing . . . and ye shall be sons of the Most High.” This is what we have found about God when we have seen Him revealed in Christ upon the Cross. We may ask

* *Unspoken Sermons*, i, p. 168.

† *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 73.

with R. Browning, "Did man invent this story?"
"Is it not too supernatural not to be true?"
and then learn from him to—

Stand before that fact, that Life and Death,
Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,
As though a star should open out, all sides,
Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

CHAPTER VII

THE FACT OF CONVERSION

THERE can be no doubt as to the greatness of the claims that we have just made. There is little wonder that to many minds they seem, when once they are really understood, to be both fantastic and incredible. They offer a revolution in our ordinary ways of thinking and ought, surely, to produce a revolution in our ordinary ways of living. "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness," says the New Testament, if we really believe that these things are true. It is because of the gap between the lives of nominal Christians and their professed faith that many find their claims hardly worthy of serious consideration at all.

To answer this we propose, in the present chapter, to consider the results of this teaching in certain individual lives, and then, in the following chapter to draw out its social consequences. When a man becomes convinced that God means what we have claimed we should expect a momentous change in his life. Is this so? At once we are confronted by the fact of Conversion.

We may quote the familiar words of Romanes : " St. Augustine after 30 years of age, and other Fathers, bear testimony to a sudden, enduring and extraordinary change in themselves, called Conversion. Now this experience has been repeated and testified to by countless millions of civilized men and women in all nations and in all degrees of culture."* When we turn to the New Testament we find its writers heaping metaphor upon metaphor to describe this change. It is a new birth, a passage from death into life, from darkness to light, a translation to a new realm, a redemption from slavery, a new creation. Hence the appeal from the reality of this experience to its fruits in transformed lives has always been pressed as one of the strongest evidences of Christianity.

Such an argument, however, needs careful testing and examination. It is true, on the one hand, that no one any longer affects to despise as mere fanaticism or hypocrisy the experiences of religious people. Our libraries overflow with books on the Psychology of Religion wherein these experiences are carefully collated and discussed. The literature of Mysticism has become fashionable and conversion discovered to be a theme worthy of a poet. But it does not follow in the least that the explanation which Christians give of their own experience is admitted to be true. The tendency of the day is rather to rank religious conversion as a well-marked example

* *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 162.

of a class of phenomena whose laws may be discovered and processes described. Professor J. B. Pratt's book on *The Religious Consciousness* is full of illustrations of this attitude. He shows us that, to begin with, the infant is not a moral person at all; he has to become one. The great task of youth consists in the formation of a true self which shall be the master and not the tool of the instincts and impulses. The establishment of fairly settled purposes is the first step in the achievement of moral personality. But purposes may and often do conflict with each other quite as much as with temporary gusts of passion and impulse. Hence the other great step in self-making is the victory of one group of harmonious purposes over all others, and the complete subordination of everything else in life to these best-loved ends.* So regarded, conversion may be called "a purely human phenomenon, independent alike of supernatural interference and of theological prepossession."

In all this there is much that is both valuable and of deep interest. The last generation was so dominated by the great ruling idea of Evolution that it was in danger of forgetting some of the more ordinary facts of life. Fascinated by the thought of growth, and noting truly enough the slow and gradual formation of habit, it forgot the sudden and startling transformations of character to which universal history and literature bear witness. Now our eyes have been turned again

* Freely quoted from chap. vii, *op. cit.*

to notice the familiar fact that sudden passions, love or hatred in particular, may so possess a man as to change his whole life. It appears that such changes may arise either as the apparent result of a single emotion or desire, or as the sudden fruition of a long and hidden preparation. We see, then, that all unknown to their subject, hidden processes of life are moving on, leading him towards some moment of crisis. As life goes on systems of associated thoughts, ideas, emotions are formed. We may act habitually for a long time from one set of principles and one standard of values. Yet all the time another set of principles may be forming within us. We may ignore and repress it for the time. Then a period comes when there is a struggle for ascendance between the old and the new. And then comes the critical moment when the new comes flooding in and overwhelms the old. William James speaks in his usual picturesque style of "the shifting of men's centres of personal energy within them and the lighting up of new crises of emotion." This is "partly due to explicitly conscious processes of thought and will, but due largely to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower."*

Psychology goes further and shows us, even when no lengthy process of preparation can be discerned, how a single act of choice may be persisted in with a tenacity that seems out of all

* *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 230.

proportion to the strength of the original desire. In his discussion on "Voluntary Decision," Prof. Stout has some interesting explanations of such cases.* He shows how, when a motive has been once adopted it becomes part of a man's *self* and all the combative instincts support it. It is further confirmed by the natural aversion to a state of irresolution and by the sense of the ineffectiveness of indecision. The strength of social relations and the expectations of his friends move the man to persist, and by each following action he becomes more and more committed to it. Hence it may be argued that if only a man can be induced to make a choice, moved upon and driven and persuaded until, at last, he commits himself, it is quite natural and likely that he should persevere. The emotion of an hour may be so wisely directed that the whole of a life may be affected, especially if the cause is intrinsically noble, so that further experience of it shows how much it merits entire devotion. Times may come when to persuade a man to *do* something, to take some definite step, seems the only way of dealing with him.

There seems no doubt that from both these points of view we are dealing with realities. So soon as we attempt to call back to the paths of honour and goodness one who has strayed from them, we appeal to his past, believing that there are dormant tendencies within him which may be roused again to reinforce our efforts. When

* *Manual of Psychology*, bk. 4, chap. x.

Christ dealt with the demoniac He asked him : " What is thy name ? " He was seeking to revive the memories of the time when he had a name of his own and a recognized place among his fellows. If such memories can be renewed, with all their gracious and restraining influences, one step will have been taken towards recovery. As the memories begin to stir, to persuade such a man to perform some self-committing action may be the best way of making them effective.

We may sum up this discussion by saying that Psychology reinforces the Christian contention that human nature is adapted for such great changes as we describe by the word " conversion." Further, it explains the success of some of the methods used in seeking to bring men to conversion. But it is plain that it drives us to face the deeper question whether we have the right to speak in Christian conversion of the direct, regenerating activity of the Spirit of God.

Let us ask how Christianity describes the experience of men who become converted. It says that the Spirit of God was with them from the first, moving them to dissatisfaction with themselves, using their natural methods of thought and action as means of instruction and discipline, yet all the while leading them to see that by such means alone true union with God could not be achieved. When that lesson had been learned they were ready to take from God what He was waiting to bestow, His gracious gift of reconciliation with Himself. But Christianity maintains

that this means a real change, a passing from the old to the new. Psychology says : " The act of yielding . . . is the giving over of one's self to the new life, making it the centre of a new personality, and living from within, the truth of it which had before been lived objectively." Christianity says that it means being " in Christ," joined to Him in one spirit, having still very much to learn, but beginning to see evil and its cure as He sees it, and setting out with Him to overcome it and by so doing to establish the Kingdom of God.

The differences are manifest, since, whilst Psychology has taught us much, we miss just this part of the experience in so-called conversions outside of Christianity. That in many such instances help has been found and old habits broken and a better life begun seems to be indisputable. Ought we, therefore, to accept a levelling down process and say that when we get behind all the apparatus of doctrines and creeds, the experiences are essentially the same—need, struggle, surrender, life ?

Before we accept such a solution we must inquire into its power to explain specifically Christian phenomena, both in their intensity and their diffusion. Till we have done this we are in danger of mistaking analogy for identity.

We may begin with the conversion of St. Paul, an event which will always stand out as one of the most influential happenings of history. Here there was probably much preparation, both

conscious and unconscious. There were the struggles after peace of conscience so graphically described in the Epistle to the Romans. There was the anger against the claims made on behalf of Jesus, all the more bitter because Paul felt that he could give no adequate refutation of them. There was the haunting suspicion that after all Stephen and the despised Nazarenes were right, and had found the secret of life. Is it enough to say that Paul's conversion meant his surrender to influences already present in his consciousness, that he was really, although he did not know it, a Christian already when he got on his horse to ride to Damascus? The force with which his new convictions possessed him may then be measured by the violence with which he had held them down before. Or, in any case, if we grant that he did truly learn one of the great spiritual secrets of life, can we accept his judgment that this came to him through the direct action upon him of Jesus Christ? Possibly such an error was almost inevitable for such a man at such a time, but for us it is the husk and not the kernel of his faith. That seems to be a fair putting of the case against the traditional view of Paul's conversion.

Now, it may be granted at once that such an analysis of the state of Paul's mind is both valuable and true. Doubtless he was trying to ride away from his conscience as he spurred along the road. Yet in an appeal to experience it is strange to affirm that the one account of Paul's experi-

ence which cannot possibly be admitted is *his own*. Here is an elemental event so great and wonderful that he is always struggling to find words big enough to express it, an event which led to one of the most heroic and world-influencing lives ever lived, and yet the man who lived it was seriously and vitally misled as to the source of its inspiration. The difficulty of such scepticism is very great.

Yet it may be said that Paul may have been in error in thinking it was really, as he says, the Lord who appeared to him, and yet may have devoted his life as he did. The difficulty of this is that when we face soberly the facts of Paul's experience we note that year by year his sense of the reality of the presence of Christ with him became more clear. His conversion was not one bright event of the past, standing out from days of comparative gloom ; it was the beginning of a close and happy fellowship of which he had no more doubt than of his own existence, tested through every conceivable experience of hardship and distress. He was familiar with the controversy that raged around Jesus and His place in history. As a devout Jew he had all the horror of sharing the worship of the eternal God with any created being. Yet he exhausts his language and even lays under tribute forms of speech derived from other religious systems, in order to express the supremacy of his risen and glorious Lord. It is the tried conviction of a long life with which we have to reckon.

We may go further and ponder the way in which Paul found in his faith the answer to the other problems of life. We have spoken of his sense of the pervasiveness and terribleness of sin. It was not enough for him to find deliverance from his own personal struggles, and power to fulfil the demands of conscience. It is not likely that this alone would have made him into the missionary of the Empire. He became that when he discovered that God had dealt and was always dealing with sin as a whole. He found this in the Cross of Christ. It is true that he may have had little understanding of this in his early days as a Christian, though he himself tells us that part of the primitive faith was that "Christ died for our sins." But later reflection convinced him increasingly of the depth and truth of this teaching, and showed him that he had found not merely a personal helper, but the Saviour of the world. Hence he became more and more certain of the meaning of his conversion. It is worth while to dwell on this mental history. Our first hypothesis to explain some incident in our own lives may be conjectural and liable to amendment, certainly it stands in need of verification. But when such a hypothesis is found to contain within itself the solution to difficulties which were, to begin with, not present to our consciousness at all, when we see that it takes its place in a harmonious system of thought and life of which it is the centre and the key, then our certainty is immeasurably increased. So it was with Paul.

His first hypothesis that it was really Jesus who appeared to him put an end to his earlier struggles and solved some of his personal problems. But when he reflected on it in later years he found that it contained, also, the solution to his gravest problems as to the relations between the God of holiness and sinful men. It gave him a world message and a world faith, and he knew that he was not mistaken. It is probably true to say that in the long run our judgment of Christ is bound up with our judgment of sin. Sin may be so terrible that none but God manifest in the flesh can deal with it. Or it may be something that may be overcome by calling up the reserves of human nature, and by submitting to the gracious spiritual influences that surround us. Paul believed that he was a sinner and that he had been saved. Those who think with him about the fact of sin believe that they can understand the reality of his conversion.

It is well before we turn away from Paul's story to note that his experience was original and not imitative. We are often warned, and rightly so, of the danger of trying to work up in ourselves experiences which we have seen or read of in others. There has been, especially in connection with the doctrine of conversion, a sort of ritual to which some teachers have tried to make everybody conform. Men have been troubled, and sometimes misled, by being taught to expect types of experience for which they were not adapted. But the first followers of Christ had no models to imitate.

They did, indeed, believe in the reality of divine intercourse with men, and they had the stories of Abraham and Moses and the prophets in their minds. But now they found that One with whom they had lived and talked was with them still, dwelling within their hearts, controlling their thoughts. It has often been shown that in this the Christian attitude differs from all others, from that of the Mohammedan to the prophet, from that of the Buddhist to his teacher. They know nothing of the daily fellowship which taught Paul to say: "I live, and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," however certain they may be of God in other ways. This new type of experience, differing from that of the mystic in that the sense of personal identity becomes more real as the relationship with Christ becomes more intense, has its historical beginnings in the first Christian generation, and has no real parallel outside of Christianity. We can find no adequate cause for the arising of so strikingly original an experience as this, save in the unique personality of Jesus Christ Himself. Thus, then, the essence of Paul's experience of conversion lay in the fact that it brought him into direct personal relationship with a real Person who dealt with his sins, reconciled him to God, and remained with Him as Lord and Master of his whole life.

This is still the claim of Christianity, attested, as we began by saying, by a great host of witnesses. When it is suggested that what is really essential in these experiences is not the actual presence of

a Helper but the belief in one, one must protest against the violence done to the experiences of those who are being studied. They learned much about themselves in their struggles towards the light. Yet, instead of being comforted by the suggestion that what they were really doing was to mobilize the hidden powers of their nature, they would have been horrified by it. "Auto-suggestion" is a great and powerful word in some circles to-day. But the saints know no such "*autos*," good enough to save them. The more they look into the depths of consciousness the more they find to distress them, and the more urgent is their sense of need of a real Deliverer. In history they find the story of One who meets all their need. In experience He comes to them. "They looked unto Him and they were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed."

We repeat, then, that the central thing in Christian conversion is the changed personal relationship. Christianity reveals the age-long conflict of God against sin, culminating in the Cross, and continuing in the work of the living Christ through the Spirit. When we bid a man believe in Christ, we tell him to take, so far as he is able, the rightful attitude of trust and surrender towards the Saviour from sin. So soon as he does this he is met by a grace that receives him and plants within him the germ of a new life. There is a work of God both preceding and following this moment. But, henceforth,

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the man has something which he could not have before. However much he has still to learn, he is now, in the central thought and power of his life, at one with God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF SALVATION

SUCH a study as we have just engaged in leaves many altogether cold and sceptical. They do not believe that there is a Christian secret into which they have not penetrated. After all, they say, you have been talking about an emotional crisis of which we know nothing and into which we have no wish to enter. Ours is an age when many people, especially the young, are severely critical of emotionalism in religion. Some of them have memories of emotions that led nowhere and only left them more callous. They do not deny the rights of religion, but they ask for something that is definite and practical. It is of little use to speak to them of a changed relationship to God unless we can show also that it means a changed relationship to men. It is to this task that we must now turn.

Now, when we ask what is the greatest need of our distracted age we find the answer in one word—"Fellowship." We find our lives hampered and confined just because there are so many barriers between us and our fellow-men. Barriers of class and of race, of education and con-

vention and prejudice, separate us from one another and result in strife and hatred and conflicting interests. It is true that we are often only dimly conscious of this. For long stretches of time we may be tolerably content with ourselves and our position and feel strong enough to stand alone, without understanding how much we need the support and the friendship of others. As Joseph Conrad writes : " Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence ; the emotions and principles ; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd : to the crowd which believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion." But he goes on to say that " the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart."* The last sentence, though it describes the experience of Europeans left solitary in Africa, has a very real meaning to us to-day, who have become aware, through the horrors of war, of the wildness of primitive passions still unsubdued in the hearts of men supposed to have been civilized for centuries. We have become doubtful about the future of civilization, familiarized with dark forebodings of the

* *Tales of Unrest*, p. 128.

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collapse of most of what makes life worth living. It is because of such things that we begin to think, as never before, of the possibilities of a world-wide brotherhood.

When we ask what are the conditions of such a brotherhood, the answer seems to be both obvious and impossible. For a universal brotherhood we should require universal brotherly love, and to be told to love everybody seems nonsensical. We hear words like that in Church, and there they have some sort of life, but to apply them outside is another matter. We are inclined to say that we are not sure that we want to do this and we are quite sure that we cannot.

It is doubtless true that real love is fatal to selfishness. Many a man escapes from the prison of self by falling in love. So said John Brindley in *Westward Ho!*—"When I first began to love her, I bid good-bye to all dirty tricks; for I had someone then for whom to keep myself clean." So said Tennyson :

Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the
chords with might,
Smote the chord of self which trembling passed in
music out of sight.

When love comes the self is no longer in the limelight, but content to wait in the shadow and give up its own claims. But can we give any meaning to the love of humanity? We can see movements in that direction. The Stoics saw in every man a part of nature, and, thinking of him as

having his place in the universal harmony, learned to regard him with toleration. So says Marcus Aurelius: "It is the privilege of human nature to love those that disoblige us. To practise this, you must consider that the offending party is of kin to you, that ignorance is the cause of the misbehaviour, and the fault is involuntary, that you will both of you quickly be in your graves; but especially consider that you have received no harm by the injury, for your mind is never the worse for it."* Similarly, Kant taught that we were to treat every human being always as an end, never as a means, reflecting that we are all sharers in the common life of reason. Yet Marcus's idea of love is a kindly toleration, not untouched by contempt. Such precepts, instead of stirring to action, rather leave us with a sense of oppression or constraint. They suggest more the uncomplaining acceptance of fate than the striving for a better world. There is no driving power in them. They are the diet of superior persons who feel themselves magnified by the moral littleness of others. They may nourish self-complacency, they will never feed the hungry. We find little help along this road.

Has Christianity anything new to say here? To begin with, it declares that "God is Love." It is well to reflect how new a thought this is. "Friendship or love," says Aristotle, "we speak of where there is return of love; but love of God admits neither return of love nor, indeed,

* *Meditations*, vii, 22.

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love at all. For it would be an odd sort of thing if a man were to say he loved Zeus.”* It is a long way from this, or, say, from Spinoza’s “intellectual love of God,” to the love of God revealed to us in Jesus calling forth in return a passion of adoration. If we deal in earnest with this thought it will lead us very far. But, we may say, how does this lead to love for all mankind? Are we not beginning at the wrong end? Should not love to man come first? Does not John say that a man who does not love the brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen? The answer is not very hard. John teaches that all love is of God. To him every unselfish act of love is a mark of the presence of the Spirit of God. Yet it is only when a man has learned to recognize the source of this love that he is able to love all mankind. Then the love of God to him breaks down his pride, subdues his selfishness, brings him out of prison, and teaches him to say, “We love because He first loved us.”

We may put this truth otherwise by saying that we can only love mankind when we see all men in God. It was the thought of the unity of the race that inspired the Stoics, but it could not bring them to the goal, because to them God was little more than an impersonal principle. It is when we see our Lord Himself looking out upon us from the eyes of the sinful and degraded, the

* I owe this quotation to Mr. T. R. Glover, *Progress in Religion*, p. 137.

alien and the outcast, even the contemptuous and the proud, and remember that they are dear to Him, and that underneath all their evil He is striving to express Himself, that we begin to love them. We find the truth in one great saying of Thomas à Kempis: "Love all for Jesus' sake, but Jesus for Himself." Those who learn to love Jesus know that this is no merely mystical dream but a plain truth of life. They cannot love Him without loving His brothers, but as they begin to love Him their love goes out to all whom He loves. Let us quote George Macdonald once more: "Lies there not within the man and the woman a divine element of brotherhood, of sisterhood, a something lovely and lovable—slowly fading, it may be—dying away under the fierce heat of vile passions, or the yet more fearful cold of sepulchral selfishness—but there? Shall that divine something, which, once awakened to be its own holy self in the man, will loathe these unlovely things tenfold more than we loathe them now—shall this divine thing have no recognition from us? . . . Shall we leave our brother to his desolate fate? Shall we not rather say, 'With my love, at least, shalt thou be compassed about, for thou hast not thine own lovingness to infold thee; love shall come as near to thee as it may; and when thine comes forth to meet mine, we shall be one in the indwelling God'?"

It is plain that this spirit would revolutionize modern society. It would transform all our commercial relationships. We go back to listen

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to John Ruskin. Mr. J. A. Hobson tells us that Ruskin exposed the three deepest and most destructive maladies of modern industrial society. These are: "First, the prevalent mechanization of work and life ; secondly, injustice as an economic basis of all bargaining ; thirdly, the definite forms of waste and injury to work and human character arising from trade competition."* None of these things is possible where love is. We may not be able to visualize the form of a perfect Christian society, but we know, at least, that there could be no victimization, no treating of a human being as a tool, no denial of joy and beauty to those who fulfil the humbler functions. Where business is regarded, as Ruskin was always urging, as just as much a service to society as the work of the teacher or the physician, all these things would pass away. How such changes can come without the new spirit of love that comes from God is unthinkable.

Similarly we may say that such a spirit would transform international relationships. Many of the nations of the world are at this time stricken with a cold and paralysing fear of one another. They dare not relax for one moment the hold which they have, or make the smallest concession, lest worse things should come upon them. The months pass by and bring calamity nearer. Here the problem is immeasurably harder. We have to reckon with racial differences, so subtle and so real. As Joseph Conrad says, speaking of the

* Cf. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order*, p. 222.

bearing of the sailors on a ship on fire, "There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct—a disclosure of something secret—of that hidden something, that gift of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations." Doubtless this hidden something is always to be reckoned with. It is this that makes all true *rapprochement* so hard. It is clear that we must find some ground of agreement that goes deeper down than this secret can reach. But there is nothing deeper unless we can find it in God. This means that it is only on the spiritual plane that diverse races can become one. A real League of Nations can only be established in a common faith. So it has been said that "brotherhood finds absolute and enduring reality only in a spiritual parentage—in a word, in the Fatherhood of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That common sonship found in sharing the sonship of Jesus Christ does, in fact—and not in rhetoric—form the one permanent foundation of world fellowship."*

Yet, it may still be said, in spite of this denial, that we are talking rhetoric and not facts. What are the facts? We are bidden to look at the Churches and consider how even those who claim to have received the new life are still separated from one another, using sometimes bitter words in controversy, often unwilling to worship be-

* Cf. Mathews and Bisseker, *Fellowship in Thought and Prayer*, p. 26.

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eat the same roof or share in the Lord's Supper. We are told that the Churches as a whole have been indifferent to the social well-being of the people, content to preach about heaven, while the conditions of life prevailing amongst many men and women have been fatal to goodness, and destructive in themselves of all high ideals. We are told that prominent members of Christian communities are fully as hard and grasping in their business life as those who are altogether outside. And as to international relationships we are reminded how the Church, or part of it, in every land, preached war and appealed to God to support the cause of its own nation. Hence there are many who believe that Christianity has proved too weak to meet the demands of actual life. Such people turn aside regretfully to seek ways of serving their generation outside.

We cannot deny the partial truth of many of these charges. Yet there are many things that may be said in reply. As to the first, it is manifest that many Christians have never learned the meaning of our Lord's parable of the Wheat and the Tares. In seeking to root up what they judge to be tares growing in the fields of others they have gone far to ruin the harvest. Yet here we dare to believe that a new spirit of toleration and sympathy is moving upon all communities of Christians. The dream of a united Christendom has dawned upon us. Woe to us if we despise it!

As to the second, it is ungenerous to forget how often the Christian motive has been and is still

the inspiration and the driving power of the greatest movements for the uplifting of the people. We may sorrowfully admit that there is in the world to-day, as there has always been, much fearless love of truth and lofty devotion to the cause of human betterment for which the Church has failed to find room. We may admit that often Christian men have spoken as though the Kingdom of God was only to be sought in heaven and not to be manifested on earth. Yet we may hold that these failures are due to the limitations of human vision, and that the faith which holds the key to the regeneration of character, once emancipated from its prejudices, possesses the only power that can remake society.

As to the third, we can plead the greatest work of the Christian Church to-day, the Foreign Missionary enterprise. Begun long since in sheer pity for the souls of those who did not know Christ, it has broadened out into a world-wide policy for the Kingdom of God on earth. The old and ignorant argument that the religion of every man is good enough for him is simply swept away before the force of the thought that the task is laid upon us of bringing together all the nations of the world into the only possible unity, "the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God." Only then, as the thought of the peoples is Christianized, and the love of Christ constrains them, will war become impossible.

Has Christianity ever, as a fact, achieved anything like this? Let us go back for a closing

illustration to the first century of our era. At that time there were made two efforts to form a universal fellowship. The first was made by Rome. Many peoples had been gathered into one under the rule of the Emperor. With the advent of Augustus and the end of the civil wars that had followed the death of Julius Cæsar, men felt a sense of security and prosperity that had been unknown for ages. They looked to the strong central government of Rome to keep in control the turbulent elements and to give them the chance of living their own lives. Yet it was felt that something was needed to bind them still more closely together, and that this could be nothing else but a religion. Hence arose that strange striving after a common faith in the worship of the Emperors. Men were permitted to hold what private religious opinions they desired so long as they consented to do homage before the image of the Emperor. In the Revelation of John we hear many echoes of the fierce persecution that arose when the Christians refused to submit to this demand. As we ponder this story we see that the Roman government had grasped the truth which we have been expressing, that religion is the only permanent bond between men. They failed, as they were bound to fail, because no one can invent a religion. The tests of time destroy every faith that is not grounded in reality. Meanwhile, the Christians, with quite astonishing success, began to produce the very results after which the statesmen sought in vain.

Gathering converts from the most diverse races, they grew into a community where, as Paul declared, "there cannot be Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman : but Christ is all and in all." It needs a strong effort of thought for us to make clear to ourselves what it meant for a strict Jew to sit at meat with a Gentile, or for a master to kneel side by side with a slave. We begin to understand when we find Paul affirming that this was a divine mystery, hidden from all the earlier generations of mankind, and now for the first time made manifest. To him it was a crowning proof of the divinity of Christianity that it could break down all dividing walls and join mankind into a new unity hitherto undreamed of.

Is this power still latent in Christianity ? That is the ultimate question for us. There are great thoughts abroad in the world, in spite of all our distresses.

Fiercely sweet as stormy springs,
Mighty hopes are blowing wide,
Passionate prefigurings
Of a world revived,
Dawning thoughts that ere they set
Shall possess the ages yet.

Yet the greatest thought of all dawned long ago when, in such deep humility, the Son of God came to visit us. In Him, says Paul, "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden." Those who are called by His name have only just become aware of the greatness of that wealth.

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If we are content to seek for it in the spirit of the one of whom our Lord spoke, who "in his joy goeth and selleth all that he hath" to find it, we shall not fail. We turn back with confidence to the words of one of our greatest teachers: "Much may remain dark to us ; but the purposes of life receive a clear and powerful direction the moment we believe that the one supreme way of life is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord, who has been made known to us from the first in the Creed. No other single way, capable of uniting the whole nature and life of man, has yet been discovered or devised which does not tend to draw us down rather than lift us up. But if in Him is shown at once the way of God, so far as it can be intelligible to man, and the way of man according to God's purpose, then many a plausible and applauded way stands condemned at once as of necessity leading no whither ; and many a way which promises little except to conscience is glorified with Him, and has the assurance of His victory."*

* Hort, *The Way, The Truth, The Life*, p. 38.

CHAPTER IX

RELIGION AND LIFE : II

LET us now turn back over the ground which we have covered and ask how far our exposition of Christianity has met the needs from which we started.

We began with the thought of man as dependent. We saw him, in his profound sense of loneliness and helplessness, reaching out to find some great Companion in whom his life was grounded and to whom he could trust himself. Christianity meets this need by its message of the God in whom we live and move and have our being. Yet it presents Him as intensely personal, possessing in perfection every virtue which is dimly shadowed forth in human nature, and as having Himself come forth to seek and to manifest Himself to men in the Person of His Son. Those who can accept this message live in perfect peace with their minds stayed on Him.

We went on to speak of man's need of self-expression and of his natural rebellion against any view that made of him a mere puppet in the hands of a higher power. We claim that this is

met by the thought of God as the supreme Artist and the supreme Thinker. There have been presentations of Christianity which have ignored this. When human life was presented as a drama in which God and Satan were contending for the human soul, and the issue was in doubt until man's last breath had been drawn, the interest was intense, but there was little room left for either thought or art. Yet this type of other-worldliness is far removed from the teaching of Jesus, or of the greatest of His followers. In his beautiful essay on Shelley, Francis Thompson appeals to Christian teachers to remember the claims of art. He says: "With many the religion of beauty must always be a passion and a power, it is only evil when divorced from the worship of the Primal Beauty. Poetry is the preacher to men of the earthly as you of the Heavenly Fairness; of that earthly fairness which God has fashioned to His own image and likeness. You proclaim the day which the Lord has made, and she exults and rejoices in it. You praise the Creator for His works, and she shows you that they are very good. Beware how you misprize this potent ally, for hers is the art of Giotto and Dante." Those who have grown up to picture Christianity as a narrow and cramping force, hostile to all natural gaiety and cheerfulness, must learn that the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ does not cramp life but fills it with new meaning. He who made man desires to see him express himself to the full, only keeping his

gaze fixed on the goal where all divergent lines of truth and beauty meet.

We may say the same about the life of thought. There was once a pitiful quarrel between knowledge and faith. There were days when all that was asked of knowledge was to justify and arrange in order certain truths already given in revelation. Those were the times when the pioneers of knowledge could be haled before ecclesiastical tribunals and called to account for their daring. As knowledge threw off these shackles and asserted its independent right, it is not strange that some seekers after truth found nothing but superstition and ignorance in the representatives of the Church. But those days are behind us now. Christians believe, as firmly as ever, that God has revealed Himself in nature and in history. But His revelation has come not in dogmas that stifle thought, but in facts that evoke it. It is not by refusing knowledge, but by thinking it through to the very end that faith must find its certainty.

So with the claims of the moral self. We have spoken of God as of One in whom there is no darkness at all, no envy or malice or waywardness, but pure beneficent goodness, so good that He cannot be content till all men are good too. Hence we see Him inexorable in His demand for goodness, shrinking from no sacrifice of Himself, bearing all the consequences of human sin. Here we find the help that we crave for when we are desperate with the sense of moral defeat. We take the

promise of victory from One who will share our lives, fight our battles with us, and make the springs of life pure and wholesome. This ideal does not bind us to a narrow set of conventional rules ; it saves us from meanness by the greatness of the task it sets before us, and delivers us from evil by joining our limited lives to a life of perfect goodness.

Moreover we have found a faith that calls our social self into a universal fellowship. We have no use for the thought of a narrow group of saints with the mass of sinners left outside in the cold. It is true that those who have found the inner secret of fellowship may be few, but the discoverers are bound to give themselves ever more freely to others. If they try to hoard their treasure they lose it. But their power of giving themselves and of understanding others comes from that close contact with that inner world of peace and gladness into which they have been led through their Lord. Through the Son of Man they learn to become brothers of men.

Hence we may claim that this ideal of Christianity is wide and deep enough to meet all the needs of our manifold human nature.

Yet, after all, we are still open to the charge that we have fallen into the common fallacy of making a God to satisfy our own desires. We are told that man is always creating ideals for himself, so as to escape from the tyranny of the primitive instincts. So Mr. Tansley writes : "The ideal may be projected upon God, repre-

sented as the Will of God, and when it is thus definitely externalized an added feeling of its security is often felt—the treasure is safe in a supernatural sanctuary. The mind, like an Indian juggler, can climb up a rope, the end of which it has thrown into the heavens. But the mind may recognize the ideal as its own creation, into the likeness of which it tries to fashion reality, whether it is concerned with an ideal of conduct or personality, with a social ideal, or with something of more limited scope and more easily attained.”*

The illustration is a bad one, since the juggler does not really climb up his rope, but only manages to suggest to the lookers-on that he is doing so. Whereas, as Mr. Tansley admits, these ideals of ours, whatever their origin, are the cause of all the real progress of humanity. It is a surprising conclusion that fictions which hang unsupported in mid-air should produce results of such value.

It may be urged again that we can find many examples of similar happenings. Thus the earlier chemists set out to find the philosopher's stone. It was never there, and yet in the search they found many of the secrets of nature. So the early navigators set out to find the North-West Passage. There was no passage to find, but they discovered a new world. So the earlier hypothesis of God may be said to have been useful in its day, but left behind for us. The difference is

* Tansley, *The New Psychology*, pp. 139-140.

that no other hypothesis has been found to take the place of God, and that whilst our spiritual needs are as clamant as ever there is no way of meeting them unless we can find God.

Moreover, there is much more to be said, even from the logical point of view, for faith in God. We have seen men setting out from very different needs, dependent, moral, intellectual, social, to find some basis for life. Hence they have spoken of God in varying terms. But the God that satisfies the conscience has been found to satisfy also the mind and the heart. The God revealed in Jesus Christ has been found to satisfy human nature as a whole. Here we come back to the argument used in our discussion of the conversion of Paul. There we saw that a hypothesis framed to explain one set of phenomena was found to explain many other facts which were not at first present to consciousness at all. That is the surest mode of verification known to science. So we claim here that the view of God which unifies life, explains human history, and gives hope for the future, is confirmed by a mass of evidence that becomes more and more impressive the longer it is considered.

Yet, finally, it may be urged that the reason why our view of God appears to meet all these needs is simply that it is a composite one. It is a very different view from those which thought of God as the great Avenger, or the supremely righteous Judge, or the almighty King. Yet all these views have been presented in the past, and

satisfied for the time those who accepted them. We may be told that we first construct a view of God that satisfies all our desires and then claim as evidence the fact that it does so. The answer to this should be plain to those who have followed our argument. Our claim is that our thought of God does not come from philosophizing or from speculation, but that it derives directly from Jesus Christ. We meet with Him on the plane of history and He offers to us the thought of God which we have expounded. If we cannot find it in Him we have no right to assert it. If, as we have urged, it is present, both implicitly and explicitly, in His teaching, then we are face to face with the fact that a view of God presented in Palestine many centuries ago is adequate for all our modern needs. Further still, we are brought up against Jesus Himself. We have urged that His life and character and claims and inner consciousness compel us to give to Him the Name that is above every name, and to recognize in Him God manifest in the flesh. Admitting this, we have in our hands the key that unlocks the meaning of history, the hope for the future, and a faith that remains undisturbed amidst the perplexities and contradictions of life. Faith in Christ is not easy. It never was. In its deeper sense it only comes, when childhood's days are past, from the strenuous confronting of all the problems of life and thought and conduct with Christ Himself. Yet as we look at Him many of us learn to say with growing certainty :

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That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows.

Or when, quoting Browning again, we are
Putting the question ever, "Does God love,
And will ye hold that truth against the world?"
we can only answer with him:

I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.

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Moulton, Wilfrid Johnson.
The certainty of God, by Wilfrid J. Mou
New York, George H. Doran [1923?]
v, 106p. 20cm.

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